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Christ's Last Message to His Church

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An Exposition of the Seven Letters of Revelation I-III

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches"

By
WILLIAM EVANS, Ph. D., D.D.
Author of "After Death—What Then?" "The Coming King," etc.

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To

THE REVEREND R. A. TORREY, D.D.,

My Teacher and Friend;

to whom I owe more than I can ever repay,

I respectfully and most gratefully

dedicate this volume.

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PREFACE

The addresses in this volume have been prepared for delivery before popular audiences. This accounts for the rather popular and perhaps conversational style of presentation. It is not to be understood, however, that they lack depth. Originally they were prepared for theological students. Years were spent in the preparation for their delivery. There is scarce a word in all the seven letters that has not been carefully studied in the Greek text. The careful reader will not need to be told this; he will observe the fine shades of meaning and turns to words that only a consultation of the original text affords. But an audience wants results, not processes. It is not so much interested in how you got your material as it is in the kind of material you have to present. And then, we who are preachers and teachers must not forget that the people who sit in front of us are, for the most part, hard-working people, whether with head or hand. They do not live in the study, as we do. What is simple to us may be quite abstruse to them. It has been my purpose, therefore, to clothe the thoughts of these Seven Letters to the Churches in a simple form, so that all may understand. Martin Luther said that if he could preach so that the servant understood him, then he was sure that the master and mistress understood. There is too much preaching over the heads of people. The preacher should aim low enough to reach the heart. That is the organ for the reception of spiritual truth. The football player is instructed to "tackle low down." I am reminded of a poem

I once read which described a preacher who evidently had his study high up in the church tower, away from any disturbance by the people. His sermons, too, apparently were too high for his congregation.

"A parish priest of austerity climbed up into the church steeple,
In order to be nearer God, and hand His Word down to the people.
In sermon script he daily wrote what he thought was sent from heaven,
And dropped it down on the people's heads, two times one day in seven.
In his age God said, 'Come down and die.' And he cried out from the steeple:
'Where art Thou, Lord?' And the Lord replied: 'Down here, among my people.'"

There is a great lesson in this bit of verse for those of us who would have a ministry that will reach all kinds and conditions of people. Our sermons are to be prepared not for ourselves but for those to whom we minister.

I am in hope, also, that the pastor may be able to find some helpful material for sermonising in these pages. In these busy days, and amid the multiplicity of duties that crowd upon him, the modern pastor has not time for much study. He knows and regrets it more than any one else. But he cannot always help it. His people will not allow him to sit undisturbed in his study mornings of the week. I know what the interruptions of a pastor's study hours are, for I have been a pastor myself. But for quite a number of years now, God has freed me from the duties of a pastorate and has given me a greater freedom as to the disposition of my time, so that I can set aside any time I choose, practically, mornings of course, without fear of being disturbed. So I trust I am not presuming

when I express the hope that pastors may find some help in these addresses.

No claim to originality is made for the matter found in these pages. One picks up thoughts here and there, and it is not always possible to give credit. This is particularly so with the author, who is constantly travelling eleven months of each year, and has not facilities for classifying reading and notes as would be the case were access to books and his library possible. The author has gathered from many sources as well as from his own personal study of the text. He is deeply grateful for all help received from whatever source, and hereby acknowledges with thanks all such help, even though its source may not be credited here.

The study of these letters written to the churches of the first century have made one great outstanding impression on my mind; namely, that the Bible is always up to date in its ability to supply the spiritual needs of the Church of Christ, and that those needs are just about the same today as they were in the first century. The Bible is true to God and true to man.

W. E.

Los Angeles

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I

THE CHRIST OF THE CHURCHES

THE VISION OF THE CHRIST

"I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet. saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea. And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; and in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as flame of fire; and his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death. Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter; the mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches."—REVELATION 1 : 9-20.

IT IS very important that we understand the picture of Christ as given in the first chapter of Revelation, for its contents are closely related to, and interwoven with, the Seven Letters to the churches as found in the second and third chapters. Indeed, it will be impossible to understand these Letters without a fair knowledge of the

"Vision of the Son of Man" in the first chapter. As we shall see more fully later, the description of Jesus Christ which introduces each one of the Seven Letters is taken from the vision of Christ in the first chapter.

It has been customary to divide the book of Revelation into three parts: "The things which thou hast seen," namely, the vision of Christ, chapter 1; "the things which are," the Seven Churches, chapters 2 and 3; and "the things which shall come to pass after these things," from chapter 4 on to the end of the book. This division of the contents of Revelation is said to be based on 1:19: "Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter." Without entering into the use of the word "hereafter" ("after these things") in this verse as compared with other parts of the book in order to show that it may not, perhaps does not, have reference to such an order of time as is indicated by the suggested threefold division, it is sufficient for our purpose to show that the very nature of the contents of chapter 1 and of chapters 2 and 3 are such that a division between them is practically impossible.

Chapter divisions, as we know, were not introduced into the text of the Bible until about the thirteenth century, and are not inspired; indeed, ofttimes the chapter marks are arbitrary, misleading and quite frequently spoil the sense of the text. The closing verse of chapter 1 tells us: "The seven stars are the angels of the churches: and the seven candlesticks . . . are the seven churches." Then chapter 2 continues this thought by saying: "Unto the angel of the church at Ephesus, write." We could, with propriety I think, read 1:19, as follows: "Write the things which thou hast seen, *even* the things which are." In many instances the word translated "and" is also translated by the word "even." It could be so trans-

lated in this verse, and, we are of the opinion, more fittingly so. However this may be, it is absolutely certain that the nature of the contents of these three chapters demand that they be considered as one.

THE VISION OF CHRIST

It is vital to our understanding not only of the Seven Letters to the Seven Churches, but also of the entire book of Revelation, that we possess a fairly adequate knowledge of the contents of this chapter. Let us glance at it briefly. It will have to be briefly, for our main purpose is to deal with the Letters to the Churches in chapters 2 and 3.

The Title of the Book (1:1). *"The revelation of Jesus Christ."* The revelation not only *by* Him, but *of* Him; both are true, for Jesus Christ is both author and content of the book. It might be said that in one sense it is the only one of the sixty-six books in the Bible that declares itself specifically to be such. Revelation differs from inspiration: Revelation concerns itself with the making known to man by God of things which could not be known by ordinary human knowledge, research or foresight; while Inspiration vouches for the accurate record of facts or statements whether revealed directly by God to man or the result of man's research or knowledge. The whole Bible is inspired, but the whole Bible is not a Revelation, in the sense that it was directly revealed by God to the mind of man. It is inspired in that the writers were supernaturally guided in the recording of it (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:19-21).

This last book in the Bible, then, is a "Revelation." No mere human wisdom could have foreknown or foreseen the events here recorded. Deity alone could make known to man the contents of this book. Without divine

aid man alone never could have made known to us the facts recorded in this book. From God, to Christ, through an angel, by the pen of John, to the Church—that is the order of its authorship. And it is this very striking characteristic of this particular book which makes its message so august, impressive, important and pregnant with meaning for all time. This book, then, is from "God, the Father, who was, and who is, and who is to come;" from "God the Holy Spirit," who is the "seven-fold Spirit before the throne;" and from "Jesus Christ, the Faithful and true Witness, the First-begotten from the dead, the Prince of the kings of the earth, the Alpha and Omega, the First and Last, the Beginning and the End." Was there ever such an august authorship connected with any other book? No wonder we are cautioned not to neglect its reading, nor add to, nor take away from, its contents. Here we have "a voice from the throne." "This is my beloved Son" speaking; "hear him!" This wonderful book, then, is not, as some falsely say, a book of borrowed visions from all kinds of legendary folk-lore and put up in Christian form. It is "The revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave unto him; to show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John."

It Is a Book of Prophecy. It is specifically so called, again and again, in the book itself. The opening and closing words of the book draw attention to this fact: "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy" (1:3); "For I testify to every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book . . . if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy" (22:18, 19). And by "prophecy" is meant, not merely "forth-telling," but "foretelling."

Prophecy here is predictive. This is important to remember in our study. Of course there is "history" in the book. But what is history but fulfilled prophecy? And Jesus Christ is the subject of history even as He is of prophecy. The history of the world is divided into B. C. and A. D. All time and history before Christ was born in Bethlehem led up to Him; and all history since has had its outgoings from Him. Indeed, in the mind and purpose of God, Christ is the sum total of all history —past, present and future. Christ is the First as He is the Last, the End as He is the Beginning. God has but one main purpose and that is to "sum up all things in Christ," to make Jesus Christ, the Saviour and Redeemer of the world, "King of kings and Lord of lords." Properly speaking there is no such period as B. C., for Christ was before all time: "In the beginning was the Word." "And he is before all things." "Before Abraham was, I am."

It means much, as to our understanding of this book, whether we look upon it as history or prophecy. Those who look upon it as history tell us that for its understanding we must have quite an extensive knowledge of works of history, such as Gibbon's *Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire,* ancient and mediæval history, the history of the Saracens and Mahommedanism, as well as that of the Reformation and the Crusaders. If this were true, then scholars only could understand this book. One wonders how the early Christians, those to whom the book had its first and helpful meaning, and who were expected to read, understand and get a blessing from its reading, could appreciate or understand its contents, seeing none of these historical helps were written at that time.

No, this book is not history; it is "prophecy." What one needs to understand it is an ever deepening knowl-

edge of the Old Testament prophets, especially the book of Daniel. The Revelation is a perfect mosaic of Old Testament texts. The "Vision of the Son of Man" is taken largely from the Old Testament; the candlesticks, Balaam, Jezebel, the shekinah throne, the four living creatures, the cherubic figures, the vintage, the harvest, the beast from the land and the one coming up from the sea, the picture of the ark and sanctuary in heaven, and much of the detail describing the New Jerusalem—all this, and much more, is taken almost bodily from the Old Testament. There can, therefore, be no understanding or appreciation of the book of Revelation without a knowledge of the Old Testament. It is a knowledge of the Old Testament, then, and not of history, that is essential here. This does not mean that history is not a most valuable aid in the understanding of this book. It is; for in the unfoldings of history we see the fulfillment of prophecy. The God of prophecy and history is One God.

It Is a Book of and for "the Church." Revelation was not written for the world, but for the Church. Its purpose is "to show unto his servants" and "to the Church," things which are to come to pass in the future. Of course this book will seem like a jumble to the man whose heart and intellect have not been touched and enlightened by the Holy Spirit. Again we say that it is the man who is at home with his Bible and who enjoys fellowship with the Holy Ghost as the divine Teacher who is able to comprehend the things recorded in this wonderful book. There is "a language of Canaan" understood only by those who have been made "partakers . . . of the saints in light." Again and again we read the words: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith *unto the churches.*" "The natural man," that

is, the soulish, psychological man, the man who depends upon an intellect unilluminated by the Spirit, "understandeth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). How can an unregenerate man comprehend spiritual things? He cannot. "But he that is spiritual discerneth all things." He can know, for he is taught of the Spirit.

Perhaps that is why so much of the language of this book is symbolic. What does the man of the world know of the symbolism of Scripture? Nothing. It is said (1:1) that God "sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John." That word "*signified*" intimates that much of the revelation is of the nature of signs, symbols, figures, metaphors. But such are not foreign to one who is a student of the Scriptures and who is familiar with the language of the Spirit. The explanation of the signs and symbols of Revelation the devout student finds elsewhere in his Bible. Indeed, it is questionable if Revelation refers to any person, thing or event that is not Biblical—certainly not anything vital to the understanding of the heart of the message of the book. The Christian, when he comes to a difficult passage in Revelation, will at once seek its explanation in some other part of his Bible. In that way his interpretation will be in harmony with the general tenor of Bible teaching, and he will not be compelled to put any forced or fanciful interpretation on the Word of God. And we might say here that one will need travel a long Bible journey in order to catch the meaning of this book. It will be a trip to the holy land and holy places and things, however, that will be well repaid. But he need not go outside his Bible.

It is interesting in this connection to note that of the 404 verses in Revelation, 265 of them contain Old Testa-

ment language; that there are said to be 285 direct quotations from the Old Testament and 550 references to it. This is remarkable when you recall that Matthew has but 92 Old Testament references and quotations, and Hebrews—that book so full of the sacrificial economy of the Old Testament—102; Revelation, you see, has three times as many references to and quotations from the Old Testament as any other book in the New Testament. That is a point well worth remembering and should be of great importance to us in our endeavour to master the contents of Revelation.

The moment one begins to read Revelation he is at once confronted with the fact that the language used is not that of every-day life, such as we find in the four Gospels, for example. We feel that we are in a different atmosphere—one in which the ordinary language of common, every-day life will not take us far. We feel compelled to look for a key to unlock its teachings, and we are persuaded that that key of symbolism must be sought for within the covers of the Bible itself, for the symbols used in Revelation are not new altogether; they have been used before in the instruction of the people of God. We find certain symbols and figures that remind us of similar ones used in connection with Old Testament characters, such as Joseph, Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, and so we feel compelled to hark back and study the life, character, and experiences, as well as the writings of these men. And then, too, we find that there are some symbols used in Revelation for which we can find no *earthly* counterpart. We feel obliged then to study the Scriptures to find out what the *heavenly* fact is to which the symbol is likened.

Another reason why Revelation is a book *of* and *for* the Church is because the Church is a party to the carry-

ing out of the great plan of God for the world which may be said to be outlined, in a general way, in this book. The Church is the representative of God and of Christ on this earth, and, in so far as it is Spirit-dwelt, it is, in that sense, the executive of the Godhead. The purposes of God are being worked out through His Church. The Church is not merely "the pillar and ground of the truth," it is also the "body of Christ" to carry out the behests of the Head, even Christ. Just how the Church has been carrying out its part in the plan of God we shall see when we come to consider in detail the Letters to the Seven Churches. Suffice for the present to say that Christ, the Light of the world, is depending on "the candlesticks" or "light-bearers" to disseminate that light.

That God has a plan for this world is clear to the student of the Bible. Things are not running of themselves or haphazardly. "There is a divinity that shapes our ends, rough hew them as we will." There may be times when it seems as though no one was at the helm. The wicked prosper; the righteous suffer; iniquity dominates affairs, while goodness seems to be powerless to mould things for human happiness and welfare. And men sometimes are led to wonder if there really is a moral governor of this universe. They cry out, "Where is the God of judgment?"

"Careless seems the Great Avenger; History's pages but record
One death-grapple in the darkness 'twixt old systems and the Word;
Truth forever on the scaffold, Wrong forever on the throne—
Yet that scaffold sways the future, and behind the dim unknown,
Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above His own."

What the plan of God is seems clear from the message of the Revelation—it is to sum up all things in Christ, to make Him head over all things, "King of kings and Lord of lords, and to make the kingdoms of this world the kingdoms of our Lord and his Christ." That is God's program. "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory for ever." There you have it—the plan of God. And it is because the Church of Christ has a most vital and important part to play in the execution and carrying out of this plan that this book, the Revelation, was written "to the Church."

And God's plan will win. That is why Revelation has been called "the throne book." It is the book of "the King, the crown, and the throne." Christ, as King, is seen actively engaged throughout the whole book. Usurpers to His throne there are, but they are finally displaced, and He reigns supreme and forever. Indeed, it may be said that the Revelation is the only book in the New Testament which depicts Christ as actually reigning as King, and exercising His sovereign rights. The *Gospels* portray His humanity, and tell us that some day He will come to reign as King; but they do not give us the picture of such reign in actuality. In the *Acts* we see Jesus accomplishing great things through His Church, but He is still despised as are His disciples and His Church. In the *Epistles* much is made of the exalted Christ, and of His being at the right hand of God, being made Head over all things to His Church, but there is no picture of an actual reign on the part of either Christ or the Church. But in the *Revelation* it is quite a different picture that is presented to our wondering view. Here it is that we see Him crowned as King and reigning; the kingdoms of this world have really become His; His will is done on earth

even as it is done in heaven; His is the honour and the power and the glory for ever and ever. Twenty-six times mention is made of the "throne." So Revelation is the "throne-book of the Bible," even as it is the book of victory and triumph. Conflict, struggle, antagonism, battle, war, there is, and much of it, but when the smoke of conflict has been blown away, we see Christ and the forces of righteousness triumphant. "The mills of the gods grind slowly;" and "they grind exceedingly small;" *but—they grind!*

The Vision Itself. We have already declared the importance of understanding this vision in order to fully appreciate the messages of Christ as found in the Seven Letters, in chapters 2 and 3. And there is another reason, a personal one you might call it. And it is this: Because of the effect of that vision on one's own life, irrespective of the knowledge of the contents of the book it may give. Who can ever see the Christ of this chapter as He is there presented—and be the same man? Can any one ever be the same after he has faced Christ? Is he not either better or worse for the vision? Once a man has come face to face with Christ, he can never forget Him. Sin, and unfaithfulness, may temporarily dim the vision, but it cannot totally eclipse the light that flashed into the soul that day when Christ was seen. A man can no more look Christ in the face and remain the same than he can look sin in the face and remain unchanged. An impress is made on the soul at such times that is never thereafter permanently effaced. We are either better or worse because of the vision.

The Christ whom John saw in the Revelation was the same Christ he had known during the days of His flesh—and yet He was not the same. No longer did He bear

the marks of His humiliation. He is now the exalted, glorified Christ. Not now the Christ of the Cross but the Lord of the throne, does John look upon. One wonders sometimes if we do not make too much of the earthly life of our Lord? Too much—by comparison only, mark you, for not enough can ever be said of what Jesus did for us men and our salvation when He took on Him our form. But what I mean is this: Do we not make too little of the *exalted and glorified Christ,* of the Christ who now is in heaven, and of His ministry there in our behalf? Oh, yes, He is the same blessed Saviour—but with what splendid, magnificent additions!

"Look, ye saints; the sight is glorious!
See the Man of sorrows now!
From the fight returned victorious,
Every knee to Him shall bow."

In the *Gospels* we saw Him in His humanity and humiliation. Once, when on the mount of transfiguration, the glory broke through His tabernacle of clay and all about Him shone with dazzling, heavenly light; but that was only for a moment; and then He was the same, lowly Jesus again. In the *Acts* Stephen said he saw the heaven opened and Jesus standing on the right hand of God; Paul saw Him in visions of the night; the Church saw marvellous manifestations of His power in the saving of souls—but Him, in His glory, they saw not. In the *Epistles* much is said as to the exalted place Christ occupies in the glory, but "we see not yet all things put under his feet." When we come to *Revelation,* however, we see Him in all His glory, "crowned with glory and honour," as King on His throne and ruling in the affairs of men, kings, and over the kingdoms of the earth. Let us make more of the Christ of the throne, the priestly and heavenly

work of Christ now taking place in the presence of the Father. Let us not make less of His earthly, but more of His heavenly ministry.

Here is John's description of the Christ he saw. It is exceedingly interesting and instructive as well as vital to our understanding of the book itself.

He was "like unto the (or a) Son of Man." That is to say, Jesus had not lost that resemblance to human form. What John saw reminded him of something human—a man. It is true there was something so glorious, bright and dazzling about that humanlike form as to cause him to fall at Jesus' feet as dead; nevertheless, the impression left on the mind of John was that of "a son of man." Of course, as we shall see later, He was "The Son of Man," too. But the main point here, perhaps, is the impression as to His appearance.

Is Jesus Christ still our divine-human Saviour and Intercessor today? Is He there before the throne with the same human body, only glorified and with magnificent additions, such as He had here upon the earth? Yes; and therein lies comfort for us. We shall rise, too, even as He did, from the dead, and with glorified human bodies, and recognizable. We shall not be disembodied spirits in that other world. We shall not be beings above us, as angels; not beings below us, as demons; we shall be human beings, glorified human beings, "the bodies of our humiliation having been transformed into the likeness of the body of his glory."

John was evidently impressed with the strikingly significant appearance of this Son of Man, for he describes Him in detail.

"He was clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the breast with a golden girdle." Here was a royal and priestly robe worn by One who by the position

of His garment was now at rest, having accomplished whatever service He had been delegated to perform. "And when he had purged our sins, he sat down on the right hand of the majesty on high, having obtained eternal redemption for us."

"His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow." This indicates eternity. This one is "the ancient of days."

"And his eyes were as a flame of fire." This indicates keen penetration. We shall see in the Letters to the churches, that these eyes of fire are exercised in searching out sin.

"And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace." Beautiful feet are they, and they bring good tidings to those who walk in the way of truth; but woe to the wicked, for these feet of fire will tread them down.

"His voice was as the sound of many waters." Thus is indicated the authority with which He speaks and declares His will.

"And out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword." We shall see later that this is a description of the Word of God, that Word by which we are to be judged. It is also the norm of faith and practice for the Church. Later He threatens to use this "sword."

"His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength." None was able to look on Him, any more than one can look at the sun with the naked eye. Holiness and unapproachableness

"In his hand he held seven stars." The stars are the "angels" or ministers of the churches. He controls them; they are in His keeping.

He is seen *"walking in the midst of seven golden candlesticks,"* which as we know represent the churches, which He intends to visit, inspect, encourage, rebuke, threaten, or reward, according to circumstances.

Here, then, is the picture of the Christ whom John saw. One does not wonder that the apostle fell at Jesus' feet as though he were dead. Consider the picture carefully, and you will understand how easy it was for John to be so overcome.

All these attributes of personality enumerated by John and possessed by Jesus indicate judgment. They are not attributes of mercy. There is something in Christ to be afraid of—that is, under certain circumstances. There is the "blood of the Lamb," and there is also the "wrath of the Lamb."

John sees this figure "*walking among the candlesticks.*" Christ's interests, you see, are on the earth and among His churches. It is not in the great governments or massive world movements, it is not in the armies and navies of earth, it is not with the great capitals of earth that Jesus' interest centres: it is in His Church. The most precious thing in all this world to Jesus is His Church. He loves it fondly. Did He not "give himself up" for the Church? Is it not His body and Bride? Quite naturally, therefore, is it that He should be intensely interested in the Church on earth. He is "walking up and down among them." One cannot help but wonder how He feels as He looks them over. *Our* hearts break when we read the record of the life, faith, testimony of the Seven Churches—those to whom He had committed His great program for its carrying out. How, then, must *He* feel, think you? And yet, see His patience and forbearance and longsuffering. Perhaps those "candlesticks" or "light-holders" ought to be "removed." We would say so. Certainly they do not seem to be giving much light, nor are they fitly representing Him on the earth. We shall be able to realize just how Jesus must have felt while standing there amid

"the lampstands" when we consider in detail their condition.

Who is this "Son of Man," this strangely garbed figure with hair white as wool, eyes like fire, feet like molten brass, face like the sun, and voice like thundering waters? The figure is not quite new. He has been seen before. As we have already hinted, there is not much that is new in Revelation. Is not this the same person that Daniel and Ezekiel saw in their visions? We think so. But, see, the Person Himself seems about to speak. Let us listen to His own identification of Himself. "*I am he that liveth, and became dead, and behold I am alive for evermore.*" Yes, He is the same personage Daniel and Ezekiel saw, but something has happened to Him since they saw Him—He has "become dead." Since those Old Testament saints saw Him He had left His place by the throne, laid aside the "form of God," and, instead, took on Him the "form of man;" since then He had "humbled himself" and "become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross;" yes, He had "become dead," in order that sinful man might be reconciled to God. But He has triumphed gloriously. He is back again at His place on the throne: "Behold, I am alive for evermore, and have the keys of death and Hades!"

AN OUTLINE OF "REVELATION"

Prologue 1:1-7

The Author, 1:1,4-6
The Agent, 1:1
The Instrument, 1:1
The Recipients, 1:3,4
The Blessing, 1:3
The Theme, 1:7

CHRIST and HIS CHURCH 1:8—3:22	CHRIST and HIS FOES The Great Conflict 4:1—20:15	CHRIST and HIS SAINTS VICTORIOUS 21:1—22:5
1. CHRIST (In glory) 1:8-20	1. THE RISE OF HIS FOES 4:1—16:21	1. THE NEW JERUSALEM 21:1-7 (Parenthesis: 20:8,9—doom of wicked)
2. THE CHURCH (On the field of history) 2:1—3:22	Opening vision, cc. 4,5	
Ephesus, 2:1-7	7 { Seals 6,7	
Smyrna, 2:8-11	7 { Trumpets 8-11	
Pergamos, 2:12-17	7 { Mystic Figures 12-14	
Thyatira, 2:18-29	7 { Vials 15,16	
Sardis, 3:1-6		
Philadelphia, 3:7-13	2. THE DOOM OF HIS FOES 17:1—20:5	
Laodicea, 3:14-22	Harlot 17	
	Babylon 18,19	
	Beast 19	
	False Prophet 19	
	Satan 20	
	Great White Throne .. 20	
	5 Group of visions descriptive of the "End"	
	1. Chap. 5-7 see 6:12-17	
	2. Chap. 8-11 see 11:15-18	
	3. Chap. 12-14 see 14:14-16	
	4. Chap. 15-16 see 16:17-21	
	5. Chap. 17-20 see 20:11-15	
		2. THE NEW ABODE OF the SAINTS 21:10—22:5
		All Usupers Defeated Satan's head bruised
		King of Kings and Lord of Lords!
		Grand Finale!

Epilogue 22:6-21

The Truth assured, 6,7
Testimony of John, 8,9
Testimony of Angel, 10,11
Testimony of Jesus, 12-17
Conclusion:
"Come Lord Jesus," 18-21

II

THE PLACE OF THE CHURCH IN THIS VISION

It is represented by candlesticks or lampstands—light-giving. This figure was familiar to John. He had seen the candelabra in the holy place of the temple, signifying doubtless that redeemed Israel should ever shine in the sanctuary of God, and also become a light unto the nations. But Israel had failed to enlighten the Gentiles. The Church is now the instrument used of God to enlighten the world (Matt. 5:14; Phil. 2:15).

The Church is to be light-giving. It derives its light from Christ, and is to give that reflected light to the world. To give light is the duty of the Church—"the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:4). If the Church fails to lighten the darkness of the world, it has forfeited its right to exist and fails to perform its appointed duty. "If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" "If the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted?" The purpose of light is to reveal (John 3:17-18), to purify (John 3:19), to lead and guide (John 12:35) and to instruct (Psalm 119). The Church is the only light of God in this dark world just as all the light was centred in and around those seven churches. Does the Church realize this responsibility and opportunity? The Church is the definitely appointed place where men shall find Christ in this world. It is in the communion of holy

men that the light and truth of God shall be found. Is the Church doing its duty at home and abroad?

"Shall we whose souls are lighted by wisdom from on high,
Shall we to men benighted the light of life deny?
Salvation, oh! salvation, the joyful sound proclaim,
Till earth's remotest nation has learned Messiah's name."

"Oh, make Thy Church, dear Saviour, a lamp of burnished gold.
To bear before the millions Thy true light as of old;
Oh, teach thy wandering pilgrims by this their path to trace,
Till, clouds and darkness ended, they see Thee face to face."

The churches were represented by candlesticks of gold. The material of which the candlesticks were constructed doubtless expresses the value of the Church in the estimation and appreciation of Christ. It may have been that John's intimate knowledge of the inner condition of the churches might have led him to depreciate them. Christ would have the apostle see the Church as it is viewed in heaven. The world does not appreciate the Church as God does. Those seven churches were small, insignificant and unnoticed in those great heathen cities, but they were considered of great value in heaven. Small churches they doubtless were in those cities, but big churches they were in the estimation of heaven. It is the duty of the Church to appreciate this estimation and live up to her standing as heaven views it.

This is the desire of the apostle in Ephesians 1: 18-20, where he prays that the Church "may know what is the hope of her calling and the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints." One wonders if the world really values the Church as it should. What would this world be if every church was closed, every Bible burned, every minister silenced and every missionary called home? See

what changes have been wrought in the Islands of the Sea, such as the Cannibal Islands, by the Church!

The Church is represented in its unity. While each local congregation is recognized (for there are seven candlesticks), yet the unity of the whole Church is also recognized. It is one cord. The Church on earth may be scattered, but in heaven it is seen together. It is one in the Holy Place. The Church believes in the same Christ, acknowledges the same Scriptures as authority for faith and life, has the same testimony regarding Christ, and derives its life from the same source.

"Elect from every nation,
Yet one o'er all the earth,
Her charter of salvation—
One Lord, one faith, one birth,
One holy Name she blesses,
Partakes one holy food,
And to one hope she presses
With every grace endued.

"And though with scornful wonder
Men see her sore oppressed,
By schisms rent asunder,
By heresies distressed,
Yet saints their watch are keeping,
The cry goes up, 'How long?'
And soon the night of weeping
Shall be the morn of song."

The Church is one: many waves, but one sea; many colours, but one rainbow; many stars, but one sky; many regiments, each with its own uniform, colours, but one army; many chords, but one anthem; many accents, but one language; many ways of doing things, but one great purpose.

CHRIST'S RELATION TO THE CHURCH

He is her Possessor. He holds the stars in His right hand. The Church is Christ's. She bears His name, gives His testimony, performs His errands. She is bought with His blood. Whoever touches her touches Him. Little did Saul of Tarsus think when persecuting the Church that he was actually persecuting Christ Himself, yet such was the case (Acts 8:1; 9:4). The Church is the Bride and Wife of Christ. With all her faults she is still His Bride, and some day He will present her pure and spotless before the throne of God (Eph. 5:26-27). The Church of which we speak so lightly and will not join, and whose responsibilities and burdens we will not carry, and in preference to which we choose the club, the lodge, the theatre, this Church is Christ's Church. And it is doubtless true that Christ is not caring to walk with anybody who does not care to walk with His people.

Christ is the Provider for His People. Just as the Church in the wilderness was provided for by God, so the needs of the Church of Christ today are supplied by Christ Himself. It is in His light they shine. Christians are lamps and torches lit by the fire that Christ kindles. By the side of the Church and of the Christian, even as by the side of the "two olive trees" (Zech. 4), will be found the source of supply. It is in the light of Christ that the Church and the Christian fight the battle. In His wisdom they plan, by His spirit they are led. Only as they are vitalized by His life do they constitute the real Church or Christian.

It is evident, too, that Christ provides the Church with ministers. He places, replaces and displaces them. The stars which Christ holds in His right hand are the min-

isters of the churches. He who "walks in the midst" of the seven churches and thus is particularly acquainted with their needs, and who at the same time holds the stars in His right hand, is the One who calls, endows, controls, sets aside or installs the ministers of the Church. Christ is the bureau of ministerial supply. He is the Lord of the harvest to whom we pray for labourers (John 4:35). Shall we understand by the fact that stars are in the hand of Christ, that ministers, if anything, are nearer to Christ than the Church?

As stars, ministers should lighten the darkness of men, reflect the light of the Sun of Righteousness, keep their appointed course, for "wandering stars are outcast from God," and should always be above the world and a sure guide for men's souls. Is your church without a pastor? Are you, a pastor, without a church? Pray the Lord of the harvest. A pastoral committee should be a praying committee.

Christ is the Protector and Guardian of the Church. The Church is in His hand "and none shall pluck them from his hand" (John 10:28-29; 17:12; Isa. 27:2, 3). This truth was a great consolation to a persecuted church. Christ is the unseen picket of His Church, as Saul of Tarsus learned while on his way to Damascus to persecute the Church. The Church has always been attended by Christ, even as the three Hebrew children of old were. When they had been cast into the fiery furnace, the form of the Son of Man was seen with them. If the Church had not been divinely guarded, she would have been wrecked, or wrecked herself, centuries ago. Because Christ is her guardian, the gates of hell shall not prevail against her. The Church will finally come with Christ "conquering and to conquer" (Rev. 19).

"'Mid toil and tribulation and tumult of her war
She waits the consummation of peace for evermore,
Till with the vision glorious her longing eyes are blessed
And the great Church victorious shall be the Church at rest."

In whatever position of danger we may be in our Church work, because of railers against the Church and God, we should go to the Church's Guardian (cf. Acts 5:22-26; Psalm 2).

Christ is the Prover and Examiner of the Church. It is doubtless pleasant for us to think of Christ as the Possessor, the Provider, and the Protector of the Church, but we must not forget that He is also its Judge and Examiner. The two-edged sword proceeding from His mouth will be used in judgment against sin within the Church as well as sin in the world.

The office of the priest in the Old Testament was to put a difference between the clean and the unclean. This will be true of course in relation to His Church.

All the attributes of the Son of Man portrayed in this chapter are attributes of judgment and will be exercised in relation to the Church as well as to the unsaved. Christ is here seen walking in the midst of the golden candlesticks (chapters 2 and 3) and examining His churches. He is the One to decide whether they are proving worthy of their calling. He is the One to declare sentence, willing indeed to admonish, correct and supply, but also to remove from the place of honour.

How many a church, as well as many a Christian, has been removed because of failure to carry out the purposes of Christ to be a light to illuminate the world! Many a church, doubtless still existing on earth, has ceased long ago to exist in representation in heaven. Alford says that "each local church has now a candlestick to be retained

or removed from its place according to its works." Our need today is not for more churches for the city but more light-bearing churches for heaven.

It is interesting to note, in these Seven Letters, each and all the things which, in the estimation of Christ, are of most importance, things which perhaps we would not have emphasized, would have passed over. This is important to notice.

THE DUTY OF THE CHURCH IN VIEW OF ALL THIS

The Church must recognize the value of her high calling and seek to appreciate and realize it (cf. Eph. 1:16-19). It must seek to maintain a walk consistent and corresponding with the heavenly pattern and calling. Light, purity, testimony, truth, activity, watching for the coming of Christ—these are the things which must characterize the true Church. There should be no inconsistency or discrepancy between the calling and walk of the Christian. High and seemingly difficult the calling may be, but it is not too much for Christ to maintain. Is He not the Lord God Almighty (1:8)?

The Commission to the Apostle to Record the Vision (1:17-20). The effect of the vision on John was to cause him to fall as one dead at the feet of Christ. To witness such visions is hard on human nature. It was for Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel.

The seer then hears words of encouragement and cheer. The gracious declaration of what Christ is gives peace to John. The deity and humanity, the heavenly and earthly existence of Christ are here clearly set forth (1:17-18). Christ is the "first and last and the Living One." He is eternal, pre-existent, and gives life. He is thus equal with the Jehovah of the Old Testament. Following this

declaration of His Person is the declaration of His work. For the purpose of redemption God became incarnate. Jesus Christ died for our sins, indeed He became incarnate that He might accomplish this great work (cf. Heb. 2:14).

Christ's victory over death, the grave and hell is here graphically portrayed. In spite of all that death, Satan and hell could do, Christ rose victorious.

The keys—that is, the authority and control over death, the grave, and Hades—are in His hands. The passageway out of this life into the other world is under His control. It is His to say not only when but where we shall go. Hades is the place of departed spirits. It is Christ who decides where the spirits of the departed shall go. The state of any individual spirit in the other world will be decided in relation to the attitude and relation of that spirit to the Lord Jesus Christ (John 8:21, 24; 14:6). This right and authority is not only because He is God, but also because He became man and through death secured eternal redemption for His people.

The fact that Christ holds the keys of death and Hades answers many questions about the future which may be incapable of human solution (John 14:1-3). The believer need not worry so long as the Saviour holds the keys.

"God knows the way, He holds the key,
He guides us with unerring hand,
Some day with tearless eyes we'll see,
And then, ah! then, we'll understand."

It is interesting to note that the command to write is associated with all this authority. Because Christ is what He is and has done what He has, therefore John is commanded to record the things which he has seen and heard.

CHART OF THE SEVEN LETTERS TO THE CHURCHES

Church	Speaker	Praise	Reproof	Warning	Exhortation	Reward
Ephesus (2:1a) Church of "Lost Love"	7 Stars 7 Lampstands (2:1b)	Work—Labor Toil—Patience Orthodoxy Unworldliness (2:2, 3-6)	Decline in love (2:4)	Remember Repent Return (2:5)	Listen to the Spirit (2:7a)	Tree of life in Paradise of God (2:7b)
Smyrna (2:8a) "The Suffering Martyr Church"	First and Last Dead—Alive (2:8b)	Work—Tribulation—Poverty Criticism (2:9)	None	None	Fear not Be Faithful Listen (2:10,11a)	Not hurt of Second Death (2:11b)
Pergamos (2:12a) "The Tolerant Church."	Sharp Sword with two edges (2:12b)	Works—Environment—Loyalty unto death (2:13)	Tolerant to false teaching Balaam Nicolaitanes (2:14,15)	Repent—or sword fall upon thee (2:16)	Listen to Spirit's message (2:17a)	Eat hidden manna—White stone—New name (2:17.6)
Thyatira (2:18a) "The Heretical Church"	Son of God Eyes like fire Feet brass (2:18b)	Works—Charity Patience—Untiring (2:19)	Yielding to false doctrine—Jezebel (2:20,21,24)	Exterminate heresy or lost Searching (2:22,23)	Be true to faith No new burden (2:24,25,29)	Authority—Rule Morning star (2:26-28)
Sardis (3:1a) "The Posing Church"	Seven Spirits of God—7 Stars (3:1b)	Few names worthy (3:4)	Name to live but dead—Imperfect works (3:1,2)	Watch—Hold fast—Remember early faith (3:2,3)	Recall—Hear Spirit's message (3:36,6)	White raiment Security—Confessed (3:5)
Philadelphia (3:7a) "The Evangelizing Church"	Holy—True Opens—Shuts Key of David (3:7b)	Entered open doors—Small but loyal (3:8-10)	None, rather vindication (3:9)	None, rather comfort (3:10)	To hold fast Crown (3:11,13)	Pillar—Security New name—God Holy City (3:12)
Laodicea (3:14a) "The Unemotional Church"	Amen—True Witness, Source of all things (3:14b)	None	Lukewarm Self-satisfied Insensitive (3:15-17)	Repent—Zealous Seek spiritualities (3:18,19)	Knock at Door Hear Spirit (3:20,22)	Fellowship with Christ in His throne (3:21)

III

THE LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES

(Chapters 2 and 3)

GENERAL REMARKS

THESE chapters teach us what are to be the fortunes of the Church through all its varying stages during all time. In the seven letters we have seven life pictures contained side by side through all the ages of the Church, now one, and now another predominating. They are prophetic types of churchly conditions which shall hold good until the end of the age.

These seven churches were especially chosen, not because they were the only churches existing in Asia Minor at that time, nor because of their geographical order, but chiefly because, in the mind of the Apostle (and of Christ, Who gave the vision), they formed the best typical representation of the Church universal. Nor are the cities and churches here mentioned the leading ones of that time. Rome, Jerusalem, Corinth, Antioch, Alexandria were great cities with most important churches, but they are not in this list. Probably the seven mentioned formed a circle from John on Patmos and back. The conditions, too, existing in these seven evidently fitted into the purpose of this book to portray the varying experiences of the Church throughout the whole Church period.

We have here described the condition, not of seven individual churches merely, although we do have that, but

a descriptive representation of the Church universal, the Church at large. Thus "the things which are" at once become a type of the things which "shall be after these things."

For this reason the whole book of Revelation is sent to all the seven churches (cf. 1:11; 22:7, 20).

The descriptions of our Lord given in the first and last letters have a far wider application than to the churches of Ephesus and Laodicea, hence each letter is but a part of a whole (2:1; 3:14).

There are three views held with regard to the exposition of these epistolary letters:

The Historical.—That they merely refer to seven historical churches existing at the time of John's writing, and have no prophetic significance whatever with regard to the future condition of the Church, and are valuable to us only in so far as they furnish material for instruction, reproof and warning.

The Prophetic.—That they have no proper historical significance; that no such churches existed at that time; that they but *prophetically* represent merely seven consecutive periods of Church history down to the end of time; or seven tendencies existing synchronically in the Church, immediately before Christ's return.

The Historico-Prophetic.—This view embraces both the historical and prophetical features of both other views.

Two Groups. These seven letters seem to fall into two divisions, two groups: the first three; the last four. This seems evident:

From the place given to the call: "He that hath ears to hear," etc. (2:7, 11, 17). In group 1 it occurs before the promise, "He that overcometh." In group 2 it closes the letter (2:29; 3:6, 13, 22).

From a comparison of change in the Revised Version. The words "I know thy works" are omitted in the second and third letters of the first group (Smyrna and Pergamos). Does it not seem that the three letters of group 1 are more closely associated together perhaps than the last four or even the entire seven, so that the words occurring in the first letter were thought to cover and extend their influence over the second and third, just as the description of the exalted Lord in the first letter sent its voice forward to the last letter backward through the rest?

From the fact that in group 1 none of the churches is represented as yielding to the influence of the world. Nor is a contrast drawn between the whole Church and any faithful remnant within her borders. The Church here has not yet begun to traffic with the world. Ephesus may have left her first love, but she has not yielded herself to the influence of the world. No reproach is directed against Smyrna. She seems to be rather the object of her Lord's perfect confidence. There is no charge against the church at Pergamos that she is allowing the world to gain dominion over her. Though there be Nicolaitanes in the second and third churches, yet they are not countenanced. In none of the first three is the Church perfect, but in none is she wholly faithless to her trust. She is in danger and needs to be warned. She is to be made perfect through suffering, yet amid all this she knows that "whosoever would be a friend of the world is an enemy of God" (James 4:4).

When we come to the second group, however, the atmosphere is different. We have the same sins spoken of twice in connection with the Smyrna and Pergamos churches. But here the Church is actually tolerating worldly practices, whereas in the first group these prac-

tices existed, but were spoken against. The churches in the second group actually suffered, allowed, let alone, and tolerated, "Jezebel."

This was true of Thyatira and so with Sardis, yet in Sardis there were a few (3:4) who had not become contaminated with the spirit of Jezebel. The Church as a whole, however, had become permeated with that spirit. Philadelphia is not blamed, and it is a matter of congratulation that there was one church in that time and setting of which it could be said that she still had "a little power." We should judge, however, from the exhortation to "hold fast that which thou hast" that evidently this church was losing even its "little power." The church of Laodicea, which had grown wealthy, had, undoubtedly, willingly identified herself with the world (3:17).

From the character of the promises to the "overcomers." There is here a marked contrast even where the same promise is made in the last group as in the first. A greater depth, wealth and fullness characterize the promises.

In group one (Ephesus, Smyrna and Pergamos), the promises are respectively that the overcomer shall "eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God" (2:7); shall "not be hurt of the second death" (2:11); shall "eat of the hidden manna" (2:17). It will be noticed that in all these rewards there is a quiet and peaceful spirit. The silent and gentle susceptibilities of the soul are appealed to. This would indicate that the Church had not yet come to the point of intense struggle in her conflict with the world as recorded in the second group.

In group two, we find quite a different tone. The rewards are more striking, bold and heroic in their lan-

guage. They indicate struggle, conflict and victory. In Thyatira (2:26, 27) the reward is "authority over the nations." Enemies shall be broken into pieces. This language indicates not only conflict but victory after severe contest. In Sardis (3:5) the overcomers are to be dressed in white garments and to be confessed before the angels of God; in Philadelphia (3:12) the overcomers are declared to be the pillars in the temple of God and shall go no more forth; in Laodicea (3:21) those who overcome are said to sit down on the throne. The last four churches have held out before them a richer and greater reward, probably because they had endured a harder conflict for truth.

In summing up the matter, then, let us say that in the first group the churches are represented as standing firm against the encroachments of worldliness. Poor these churches may be in this world's goods, but rich they are in faith. Sin may be in her midst, and evil surrounding her, but she has not yet yielded to it.

In the second group the language would seem to indicate that the Church had identified herself with the world. Occasionally she seems to rise above her sinful environment, probably when some new incentive is presented to her, but finally they seem to succumb to the inevitable and are satisfied with worldly conditions. Of course, as always, there is here "a faithful remnant." It is a small portion, however: "a few."

The meaning of the word "Church." The word "Church" comes from the Greek word "ekklesia," and denotes those who, having heard the voice of God calling them from worldliness and sin, have responded thereto and have separated themselves unto Christ. These letters teach us what the Church is, and for what it stands.

The condition of the Apostolic Church. One is amazed to find the Church in such a condition as represented in these letters. We naturally look for something better. True, there is somewhat of good and something to commend, but there is much that is bad, and a great deal meets with the censure of Christ. Five of the seven churches compel serious censure from Christ. In one of the churches there is absolutely nothing to commend. But two of the seven escape censure, although there are elements found in these two which meet the disapproval of the Lord. At least the Church is in danger of being contaminated with influences of which He disapproves. The churches of Smyrna and Philadelphia bring forth praise only; those of Sardis and Laodicea almost entirely rebuke only; Ephesus, Pergamos and Thyatira present such a mixed condition as to merit both praise and condemnation.

It is well to remember these things in these days when we hear so often the cry, "*Back to the early Church,*" and when there is a tendency to depreciate and find fault with the Church of the present day. The Church of today has her faults, undoubtedly, but so did the early Church. A perfect Church is not possible in this age. Some day, however, Christ will present the Church without blemish or spot or any such thing. That day will be when He comes for His bride, the Church (Rev. 19:6-9; Eph. 5:25-27).

These letters are called "Epistles." It has been well said that they are not so much messages from an absent Lord as the sentences of a present Judge engaged in the solemn action of inspection and decision. Jesus is engaged in the same work today. His eye is still upon the Church and the individual Christian.

These letters to the churches are Christ's own and last words. They are just as much Christ's words as His parables in the Gospels. They are exceedingly interesting and profitable on that account, yet they are not always studied in this sense and as the sayings of Jesus. Numberless are the comments on the parables and the Sermon on the Mount, for example, but few on these letters as having this distinguishing feature of being the very words of Jesus. Indeed, the tendency is to pass very lightly over chapters 2 and 3 in this wonderful book, and all this in spite of the sevenfold entreaty: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

These letters are addressed to the Pastors, the angels of the Churches. The Spirit of God speaks to the Church through the leaders, pastors, or angels of the churches.

We think the word "angel" refers to pastors, teachers, leaders or representatives of the churches. False ministers are called "wandering stars" (Jude 6). Faithful ministers are said to "shine as the stars" (Daniel 12:1, 3). In Malachi 2:7 we are told that the priest's lips should keep knowledge for he is "the messenger (angel) of the Lord of Hosts."

Lightfoot, in quoting from the Talmud, says, "On Sabbath eve the minister or angel of the synagogue sounded a trumpet from the roof of a high house to notify the faithful of the coming of the Sabbath." The promise in these letters is to "the overcomer." Angels are not "overcomers," yet the address and promise of each of these letters is to the same person or personages.

If a real angel were meant how could John write a letter and send it to him? How could an angel be censured, chastised, be subject to rebuke and heresies, called

on to repent? Surely all this cannot be true of angels, hence the meaning must be otherwise.

Of course, we should not forget that angels are appointed as guardians over nations, like Michael over Israel, the prince of Persia and Grecia (Dan. 10:20-12). So some think an angel may stand for a church (cf. 1 Cor. 11:10). It does seem as though angels had charge of individuals (Matt. 18:10; Acts 12:15; Heb. 1:14). Of course, we should not forget that the symbolism of Revelation partakes of a heavenly as well as earthly character.

The ministry is an office of divine appointment and privilege. The minister receives his power and authority not from himself nor from the Church to which he ministers and of which he is a part. His authority comes from Jesus Christ. No man can be a real minister unless he is in the hand of Jesus Christ and has the gift. He who walketh in the midst of the churches holds the ministers of the churches in His right hand, thereby indicating that they are there because He has the right to wield and to hold them. In asserting the dignity of the ministerial office, we are not arguing for "priestism." We believe in the universal priesthood of all believers, and yet we believe that the Holy Spirit has given to the Church pastors as well as evangelists, prophets and apostles. No mock humility should deter the minister from exalting the glory of his office. It is a great honour that God has conferred on any man.

It is an office of responsibility. The pastor is to hear, see and answer for the church committed to his care. He is to feed, care for, watch over the people of God. He is to give to them what he gathers from God. He is responsible to God for their spiritual condition (Heb. 13:17). This may account for the preaching of some

strong sermons, for the preacher would like to give an account of his ministry with joy, not with sorrow.

As "stars" the ministers should centre around the Christ. They should lighten the darkness of men, reflect the light of the Sun of Righteousness, keeping their appointed course, for "wandering stars" are cast out from God. "No man having put his hand to the plough and looking back is fit for the kingdom." When a man is once called into the ministry by the Holy Spirit, he is called for life. This thought makes one careful with regard to resigning from or leaving the ministry (Isa. 14:12; 1 Cor. 9:16-27). As stars, ministers should always be above the world (Gal. 1:4), and they should be a sure guide for the souls of men. As the star of Bethlehem guided the wise men to the place where they found the Christ, so the objective of the ministers' message should be to lead men to Christ.

There is a sense in which the substance of these letters has a vital relation to the remainder of the book. The "tree of life" (2:7) is developed more fully in 22:2, 14.

The second death (2:11) in 20:14; 21:8.

New name (2:17) in 14:1.

Authority over nations and the bright and morning star (2:26, 28) in 20:4, 5; 22:16.

White garments (3:5) in 7:9, 14; 19:8.

City of my God, New Jerusalem (3:12), in 21:2, 10.

Sitting on thrones (3:21) in 20:4.

Note, also, the progress of the doctrine of the Coming of Christ in the Seven Letters.

"I come" (2:25).

"I come as a thief" (3:3).

"I am coming quickly" (3:11).

"I am at the door and knocking" (3:20).

Note, also, the high place given to this doctrine as a motive to penitence, hope, steadfastness and godliness:

Ephesus—A growing coolness in their love . . . speedily repent . . . or suddenly overtake (2:5).

Smyrna—Suffering and great tribulation in the world. Look for crowns at His coming . . . faithful (2:10, 12).

Pergamos—Tempted to allow Balaam and Nicolaitans doctrine. The coming a dread (2:16).

Thyatira—Struggles and temptations, the coming, incentive to holding fast (2:15).

Sardis—Commanded to hold fast what received. Repent, watch, on pain of having Lord and judgment come upon them as a thief which is contemplated as the worst thing that could happen (3:3).

Philadelphia—Announced as a source of comfort and hope . . . speedy coming (3:11).

Laodicea—Represented as already present at door, prepared to bless recipients. Spew out lukewarm masses who fail in representation and reception (3:20).

The promised rewards all have some reference to the New Jerusalem. It is a point worth noticing that all the names, titles and terms, by and in which Christ addresses Himself to the seven churches, are based on the Christophany of the first chapter. In proof of this note and compare:

Ephesus 2:1; cf. 1:16. Seven stars.
Smyrna 2:8; cf. 1:18. Liveth, dead, alive.
Pergamos 2:12; cf. 1:16. Two-edged sword.
Thyatira 2:18; cf. 1:14. Eyes, feet.
Sardis 3:1; cf. 1:4. Seven spirits.
Philadelphia 3:7; cf. 1:18. Keys, holy.

Laodicea 3:14; cf. 1:8-11. Alpha and Omega—First and Last.

Note that each letter to the churches has the same sevenfold analysis: 1. The Address. 2. The Description of the Speaker. 3. Praise. 4. Reproof. 5. Warning. 6. Solemn Appeal. 7. Promise to "him that overcometh."

Some see in them a fivefold analysis: 1. Title of the Epistles. 2. Praise. 3. Censure. 4. Counsel. 5. Promise.

Viewing the seven churches in historical, prophetic light we see: That the Church has consisted and will continue to the end of time to consist of a mixed society—intermingling of good and evil. Cool, fallen, backsliders, heretics, patient, fervid, faithful. The professing Church, Christendom, of course, being meant.

This is seen in the parables of the Tares and Wheat, of the Sower, of the Fishnet; Cain and Abel at one altar. Judas, Ananias, Simon Magus, Demas, Diotrephes—here they are, all of them, enrolled on the same list.

Not the most consecrated pastor, nor the closest scrutiny, or careful teaching can prevent this. He who seeks to find a perfect Church seeks in vain.

IV

THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS

THE CHURCH OF "LOST LOVE"

"Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: and hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God."—REVELATION 2: 1-7.

The Address: "To the angel of the church at Ephesus." Ephesus was the principal city of its province, the capital of Iona, and the greatest emporium of Asia Minor. It was doubtless because of its prominence that it finds itself the first of the seven churches addressed.

Ephesus was notedly famous for its most gorgeous temple of Diana—one of "the seven great wonders of the world." It is said to have taken 220 years in building. It was made of shining marble. Its dimensions were 342 feet long and 164 feet wide. It was supported by 127 columns of Parisian marble, each single shaft being 60 feet long. In the centre of the temple, concealed by curtains, stood the image of the goddess Diana, said to have

fallen from the sky. Immediately behind the shrine could be seen the safety vault where the wealth of kings and the treasures of all Asia were kept. The valuables of the nations were deposited there for safety. From the throats of many thousands of ardent devotees might be heard the cry, "Great is the Diana of Ephesus." Acts, chapters eighteen to twenty, give quite an interesting account of the devotion of Ephesus to her goddess, Diana, and should be carefully read in connection with the study of this letter.

Ephesus was noted also for its magnificent theatre (Acts 19:29) which, it was claimed, seated 50,000 people—the largest seating capacity in the Greek world. It was carved on the western side of Mount Oreosus; and was open to the sky.

Close to the theatre was the magnificent stadium in which the races were run, the gladiatorial combats took place, and where the mammoth assemblies satisfied their lust for blood by watching the death struggle between man and beast in the arena. Here, too, was the great gathering place for the assembling of the multitudes when any great public question was to be discussed. It was hither they rushed Paul's companions (Acts 19:29), while the great assembly debated what should be done with them.

From the Christian point of view, too, Ephesus was a most important city. The Apostle Paul was the founder of the church there; John, the apostle, was an elder there; Mary, the mother of our Lord, was enrolled among its members; Timothy, to whom two of the Pauline epistles were addressed, was its faithful pastor. It has been said that the other six of these seven churches mentioned were the result of the activity of the church at Ephesus. Perhaps no other of Paul's epistles con-

tains spiritual truth as deep as that addressed to this church. It is claimed that once Ephesus had Christian churches almost rivalling in splendour the pagan temples of Greece. Figuratively at least, if not literally, "the image that fell down from Jupiter" lay prostrate before "the Cross of the Christ," and many tongues, moved by the inspiration of the Spirit of God, made public confession of their faith in Christ as the Saviour of the world. And thus Ephesus may be said to have been the principal city, not only from the political and pagan standpoint, but also in Christian and spiritual influence. It was to this city, then, that Christ addressed the first of His seven messages. And there is a sense, as we shall see later, in which this first letter may be viewed as introductory to the entire seven.

The Speaker: "These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks." We know (1:20) that the "seven stars are the angels of the seven churches; and the seven candlesticks . . . are the seven churches." We are here taught, then, that the Speaker has full and perfect knowledge of the churches, both pastor and people, and is, therefore, thoroughly competent to pass judgment on them. And perhaps we should say that He is the only one competent to thus criticize and condemn, for He alone has perfect knowledge of all circumstances and conditions. A pastor's knowledge of his people is a limited one. The members of a church do not know each other. If we knew each other as we really should, do you think we would be as merciless in our criticism as we ofttimes are? You have, perhaps, heard the story of the man in the Pullman sleeper who, after patiently listening for an hour or more to a screaming

baby, called out to the man who was walking up and down the aisle with it, "O, take that kid to its mother." The man replied, and there were tears in his voice: "I would gladly do so, my friend, but this baby's mother is in a casket in the baggage car." Would the critical man have spoken as impatiently as he did had he known all the circumstances? I think not. Nor would we be so harsh in our criticisms of others—"if we knew."

"If you see a tall fellow—the head of a crowd;
A leader of men, marching fearless and proud;
And you know of a story whose mere telling aloud,
Would cause his proud head to in sorrow be bowed;
It's a pretty good thing—to forget it."

"If we knew the baby fingers pressed against the window-pane,
Would be cold and still tomorrow, never trouble us again;
Would the bright eyes of our darling cast a frown upon our brow?
Would the prints of rosy fingers vex us then as they do now?
Ah, those little ice-cold fingers, how they point our memory back
To the hasty words and actions strewn along life's weary track;
How those little hands remind us, as in snowy grace they lie,
Not to scatter thorns but roses for our reaping by and by."

O compassionate Saviour of men, so patient, loving and forbearing with the waywardness and faults of Thy children, help us to follow in Thy steps. Keep back from our lips all idle words of acidity and criticism. May we remember our own weaknesses and the imperfection of our knowledge.

The "*stars are in His right hand.*" That is encouraging for the ministry. I say ministry, for I am taking the word "angel" to represent today what it did in early days—the leading functionary charged with the responsibility of a large synagogue (the "Shehach"-ambassador

or angel) ; so now we may refer it, at least for practical purposes, to the one who is charged with the responsibility of a congregation. The minister is very near to the Master. He is in the grip of His right hand. The word "holdeth" is used elsewhere for "to keep one's mind on" (Mark 9:10), "not to leave" (Acts 3:11), "not to forsake" (Col. 2:19). It is most encouraging to the minister to be assured that Jesus knows all about his problems, the burdens that oppress, the things that break the heart, the unresponsiveness to the message and appeal—He knows it all, and He bears you up in His hand and keeps you near to His loving heart. He does not forsake you, my brother in the ministry. Then do not you forsake Him and leave the ministry because of its discouragements and lack of appreciation. He knows it all, and He cares.

Then, too, He "*walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks.*" He is continually walking in the midst of His churches, blessing them with His continued presence. He remains with them in spite of their faults and failure. And these seven messages reveal a great deal of failure on the part of the Church. Yet He remains in her midst. He abides with her, dwells in her centre. We want to get out of the church as soon as she proves herself unfit and unworthy. He stays inside it. He walks to and from amid the lampstands.

And the lampstands are "of gold," too. That's wonderful, for it shows the value Christ puts upon His Church. John, knowing the churches as he did from their weak side, might have been tempted to undervalue them; he might have spoken of lampstands of iron or brass. To the Master the Church is the whitest, purest, sweetest thing on earth. It has its faults and failings; nevertheless it is His Bride, and some day He will present

the Church to Himself a glorious Church, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. There is far too much criticism of the Church going on nowadays, even among Christians. We are not to "marvel if the *world* hate us," but it should cause us concern when *Christians* hate each other.

"I love Thy Church, O Lord,
Her walls before Thee stand,
Dear as the apple of Thine eye,
And graven on Thy hand.
For her my tears shall fall,
For her my prayers ascend,
To her my cares and toils be given
Till tears and prayers shall end."

The Commendation: "I know thy works and thy labour and thy patience," etc. The Master praises before He blames. I like that about Christ. We, usually, do the opposite. The average man is more easily and effectively moved by praise than by censure. Jesus said to that little band of disciples, "Ye are the salt of the earth; ye are the light of the world." That was a great thing to say to such humble folk. But it was just like Him to say that. They believed He meant it, too, and went out to be just that to the world. And history bears witness that He did not make a false estimate of them. Jesus believes in us, and trusts us; and that makes us willing rather to die than to disappoint Him. If nobody else sees good in us, He does. He is like a mother in that.

"I know." He can be neither deceived nor surprised. "He knew all men. He needed not that any man should testify of man. He knew what was in man" (John 2:24, 25). He knew what was in Nicodemus and in Zacchæus. "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile!" said He, of Nathaniel. "Whence knowest thou me?"

asked Nathaniel, in surprise. Then said Jesus, "Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee." Of course He knows all. Is there anything that is hidden from His sight (Heb. 4:12)?

Can you not work better when some one is looking on who understands and encourages, someone like Jesus who is so appreciative? Do you not feel like taking more pains because He knows and sees? "I carve for the gods," said a Greek artist when asked why he was as careful with the work that was hidden from the public view as with that open to the eyes of men. The hard things of life are easier to bear if we know that Jesus is looking on, just as it is when we know that mother is by our side and our hand is in hers. To suffer alone in "No man's land" and with no one near or looking on—ah, that's hard. But when He is near—well, that's different. I was once carried off a train and driven in an ambulance to a city hospital, having been taken suddenly and seriously ill. There I lay, alone and unknown, but the Saviour was with me and I heard Him say, "I know." And that was much. "He knows the bitter, weary way; the endless striving day by day. He knows it all."

"Does Jesus care when my way is dark,
And filled with a nameless fear?
When this sad heart aches until it almost breaks;
Does He care enough to be near?
O, yes, He cares, I know He cares,
His heart is touched with my grief.
When the days are weary, the long nights dreary,
I know my Saviour cares."

"Thy works . . . labour." Different words: "works"—the severe application to the thing in hand; "labour"—that exhaustion that follows intense work. Works, not words; your doings, not your sayings. "I know the

business, the traffic, the deeds, the actions being done in my name and for my sake."

The church at Ephesus was *a working church.* It was not, as too many churches are today—a saint's rest, where they fold their arms and sing themselves away into everlasting bliss. It was a church constantly having additions, just like the church in the Acts to which "the Lord was adding daily such as were being saved." It sang "Rescue the perishing" as well as "Safe in the arms of Jseus." It was evangelistic as well as evangelical. It not only fed the sheep in the fold, but also went after the sheep that had strayed. Too many churches are composed of members who just attend church Sunday morning and sing hymns and do nothing else. "Dear saints of God," the pastor sometimes calls them. They occupy the same seat in the church every Sunday morning, and they have done so for years. The pastor would not know what he would do without them, and for the life of him he does not know what to do with them. But there they are, shiftless and lazy in spiritual things.

I passed a church the other day and read on the bulletin board that the church was open for Sunday morning service only. No Sunday evening service, no Young People's Sunday meeting, no midweek prayer-meeting. Think of it: a great building representing an outlay of perhaps $300,000, and open just for one service a week. What a church like that needs is to be set on fire—the fire of the Holy Ghost.

A church that conducts but one service a week and closes for three months during the summer has lost all conception as to the function of a church. It will rust out, but never wear out. Not such a church was that at Ephesus. It was a veritable beehive.

"*Thy labour.*" Jesus knew the "labourious" efforts

of the Ephesian church. The members knew what it was to suffer complete exhaustion as the result of their work for Christ. A real weariness followed their severe toil for the Master. They actually suffered bodily fatigue for Christ in order to see the fruits of their labour for Him.

We are in great need of more churches of this kind. Too many churches are satisfied with indifference. They are not only not adding new members to their number; they are not even "holding their own." "We are looking up," said a pastor in reply to an inquiry as to the condition of his church—which, by the way, had not even held its own for some years. "Looking up"—so they were; they were on their backs so they could do nothing else but "look up." Such are the churches and pastors that argue against statistics. They say, "we have no right to count heads; it is hearts that count, and no one but God can read the heart." But there are statistics in the Acts, our attention being drawn specifically to the fact that on one occasion there were three thousand and on another five thousand added to the Church. Then, too, the number of those gathered in the upper room on Pentecost is given as one hundred and twenty. Can it be that it is but idle churches that complain against statistics? Of course numbers are not everything, nor do they always count for strength. Gideon's army illustrates that fact. What would you think of a lawyer who never won a case, a doctor who never cured a patient, a salesman who never sold a bill of goods? How about a pastor and church that does not win souls?

The Ephesian church was most aggressive. It is doubtful if any other church of its day equalled it in zeal for Christ. It was not only evangelical, it was evangelistic also. It was "sound in the faith," but it was not like so

many "sound" churches—"sound asleep." For evangelism it has no parallelism in the history of missions. "All who dwelt in Asia heard the word" through the efforts of this church. Ephesus established churches in Colossæ, Hieropolis and Laodicea (Acts 20:17; Col. 2:1). It raised up and sent forth such lay preachers as Epaphras, Tychicus and Trophimus. Aquilla and Priscilla, noted Christian workers, were resident there. Nor was the salvation of sinners overlooked: "so mightily did the Lord's message spread" (Acts 19:17-20). The Ephesian Christians transformed communities by saving individuals. It was a soul-winning church. And such a church will not die.

Is the church to which we belong like the Ephesian church? Are we the kind of Christians they were? We labour, even as did they, but is it in the work of soul-winning? Many a woman has gone home absolutely fatigued, and had to send for a doctor, as the result of having exerted herself so much in arranging for a church supper and bazaar. The Ephesian church spent itself for Christ. Do we work and hunt for souls until we fall from sheer exhaustion in our tracks? Do we? Why, today, if a young man is seen exerting himself apparently overzealously in the work of God, he is told to "go carefully" or he "will wear himself out" or, perhaps, "die young." One sometimes wonders if the Church is not dying for some who are willing to die young for it!

"We live in deeds, not in years; in breaths, not in figures on a dial.
We should count time by heart throbs.
He lives longest who acts the noblest, thinks the best;
Lives in one hour more than in years do some,
Whose thick blood sleeps as it courses through their veins."

Christ died young. Luther died young. Countless others

have died young for Christ. Shall the reaper, Death, have naught but the bearded grain?

What do we know about labouring for souls, agonizing in prayer, earnestly contending as an athlete in our endeavour to propagate the gospel? Have we yet "resisted unto blood?" Do we labour and travail to bring forth souls for Christ? We strive about words until it hurts and we are sick over it, but do we thus strive about works until we faint? Gold hunters endure all kinds of hardships in their search for the precious treasure; do we in our hunt for souls of men? We are said to be "labourers together with God." Are we? How does God labour? Do we labour like that? Paul speaks of his "labouring day and night" for souls; do we (1 Thess. 2:9)? People labour night and day "having a good time," going to theatre, the dance, the card party, etc., almost every night in the week. Do we thus tire ourselves out for God? A man was seen hurrying along the street, and was accosted by a friend. "Where are you going," said the friend? "To see a young man in the hospital." "What is the trouble?" "T. B." "Too bad," said the friend, "how did he get it?" "Trying to keep up the pace with me," was the sad reply. This young man was dying as the result of trying to keep up the pace required by a life of sin. What a glorious thing it must be to die young for Christ; do you not think so? Let us not say, as did the people of Malachi's day, concerning the work of God and His house: "O, what a weariness it is!" "Let us not be weary in well doing."

"*Thy patience.*" I like that. Jesus valued their waiting as well as their working. They could "remain behind when others had gone ahead"—that is what the word means. They could labour, and when not seeing immediate results, thank God that others, coming later, would

reap the fruits of their efforts. They did not grow weary in the work even though they saw no quick returns. Oh, the patience of men like Carey and Moffat: labouring in the foreign fields for years without seeing results, but believing in a coming harvest time! Of course there had been no seed-sowing there, and so these brave missionaries knew that there must be a waiting time. With us, in this land, it is different: we have the seed of the Word of God sown for many centuries and have a right to look for results, even as the husbandman had a right to look for fruit on the fig-tree that had been planted for years in his vineyard (Luke 13). "We shall reap if we faint not." We must not be envious at the prosperity of the wicked. Fret not thyself; be calm. We are saved by hope. Light is sown for the righteous. "Well," you say, "we have been here for years, and the audiences are still so small and results so few." Be patient; we shall reap if we faint not. There is "a patience of hope," remember. Twice or thrice Jesus commends "patience" in this letter, so He must value this grace highly. He speaks of their "enduring and having patience for His name's sake," and "having borne burdens and not having grown weary for Him and His cause."

But "patience" has reference to "waiting" as well as "working." There are times when the Christian cannot work; he is laid aside on a bed of sickness, or is superannuated. He is physically unable to be "active" as formerly for the Master. He would if he could, but he couldn't if he would, now. But Jesus knows the heart and the desire, and admires the patience that accepts the will of God without complaint. He says, "I know thy patience." David wanted to build a temple for God, but was not permitted to do so. He was heartbroken by disappointment. But the Lord said to him: "David, you

must not feel as you do about this matter. I know your desire and purpose and how anxious you are for my glory, and I accept the will for the deed." And then we find these beautiful and comforting words added: "But it was good that it was in thine heart to do this thing for me."

Christ sees the hidden, quiet, unobtrusive graces of the heart. He sees the soldier who is wounded and carried back of the lines as well as the man who is on the firing line. He sees us when we are in the trenches waiting for the command to go forward—a position that requires much more patience than "going over the top." Christ saw you that day when someone said an unkind word that pierced your heart, and, in patience and for His sake, you held back a hasty reply. He saw "thy patience." And He loved you for it, too.

"Thou canst not bear evil men." Christ commends this church because it was not willing to entertain unconverted people in its membership. In short, that is exactly what this phrase means. It was not able, it did not see that it was fitting and proper in view of what the body of Christ actually consists of, nor in any moral sense did it consider itself a fitting or becoming thing to tolerate, carry, support, endure or entertain hospitably in their midst as fellow-members of the body of Christ those whose lives were evil, wicked, of bad quality or disposition, mischievous, harmful and faithless to the Christ and His cause and Church. In other words, this church was not a church that could "mix well" with such people; the members of the church of Ephesus were not what you call "good mixers."

Thou "canst not:" that means they simply could not, that's all there was to it. And Jesus commended them for it. A strange attitude of Jesus, certainly, in view of

present day church conditions, wouldn't you say? But then Jesus is always the un-understandable Man. Is not the church today which fails to merit our Lord's commendation here guilty of a false charity in that it fails to make a distinction as to who ought or ought not be in the fellowship of the Church of God. It is all right to say "Judge not;" but that has reference to a spirit of condemnation and personal censure and not to the proper sense of discrimination to which Jesus refers when He tells us to "give not that which is holy to dogs." Jesus is just as anxious that we should exercise the power of discrimination as that we should refrain from critical censure and condemnation. Here is a lesson for the preacher who takes into the fellowship of his church men and women who he knows do not have the Spirit of Christ in their hearts and lives. He looks at the position, influence and wealth they have instead of their personal relationship to Christ.

"Thou hast tried them that say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars." In other words, Jesus commends this church because it took care of the doctrinal condition of its pulpit. It allowed no one to occupy it who was disloyal to Christ and the gospel. Ignatius, in speaking of this matter, says: "Now Onesimus of his own accord rightly praiseth your orderly conduct for that ye all live according to truth, and that no heresy hath a home among you, nay, ye do not so much as listen to anyone if he speak of aught else save Jesus Christ in truth." So you see this church had greatly profited by the injunction of the Apostle Paul in his farewell address to its elders at Miletus: "Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I

know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock" (Acts 20:28, 29). An illustration as to the way in which the church at Ephesus came out against false "isms" is found in Acts 19 in the matter of the burning of the books belonging to the cult of Spiritualism.

This church "tried" candidates for its pulpit. They put them to the test; assayed them as gold is assayed; proved them as, according to John (1 Ep. 4:1) they were duty bound to do; and after trial they approved or disapproved of them. There had been some wonderful preaching from the pulpit of the church at Ephesus. Paul had proclaimed the truth there with courage of conviction and persuasion of tears. A careful reading of the history in the Acts shows that much had been made of repentance, faith in Christ, and bold confession of Him before the world. Much emphasis, too, had been laid on the place and power of the Holy Ghost in the Christian life (Acts 12 and 19). Both preacher and people, pulpit and pew had been set on fire by the Holy Ghost. The preaching they had listened to had been with the intention of saving souls. This had been the history of the pulpit of the church at Ephesus, and the elders of that church were determined that the sacred desk in their church should never be defiled by false teaching or by allowing the proclamation of any message save that of "Jesus Christ and him crucified." How different today in some cases. One recalls outstanding orthodox pulpits a generation ago that now are filled by extreme liberalists.

Is there not something here that is worthy of emulation on the part of the modern Church of Christ? Think of what is allowed in the pulpit of many a so-called Christian church today? Unitarians, Jews, agnostics are allowed to enter it and, by their very presence as well as their mes-

sage, defile the sacred altar of the Christ. And, worse than this, there are many who pose as "ministers of Christ" who are nevertheless disloyal and untrue to the Person and teaching of the Christ. "They are enemies of the Cross of Christ." And yet the Christian Church—by its synods, conventions, general assemblies, conferences, governing bodies—apparently winks at these conditions. No wonder the Protestant Christian Church is in a perilous position today and, according to some, is threatened with death. The moment the Church of Christ ceases to discipline she has begun to die. An infected finger must be amputated from the body, if the body is to be saved. No disloyal, wicked, heretical member should be deemed too wise, too scholarly, too influential or too rich to evade discipline if he deserves it.

There always have been, there always will be men in the pulpit who love to exploit their own fancies and propound their own theories rather than proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. What they proclaim is not the "good news;" it is "another gospel;" and the "anathema" of Christ rests upon those who "preach any other gospel." That the church at Ephesus had had some actual experience in this matter is evident from the nature of the words here used. They had "tried"—that is, "put to an actual test"—certain candidates for their pulpit who had claimed, asserted, affirmed, professed themselves to be true messengers of the Christ, and after examination they had been "found," discovered, detected—the word meaning to find out for oneself—to have been false.

The Scriptures, such as were existent then, were to the church the final and supreme test of orthodoxy. Creeds are but witnesses—but they *are* witnesses as to what the Church believed the Scriptures to teach. The Bible is the final judge. After all, the creed was not so much a

test as it was an expression of what the Church actually believed. The Bible message is Truth. Whosoever teaches contrary to the Scripture is here described as a "liar." The name given to false teachers is that of "liars." We sometimes call them scholars, advanced thinkers. The Bible calls them "liars," and "antichrists" (1 John 2:22-24). Jesus Christ is "the Faithful and True Witness." So is the Church of Christ when true to His teaching. No church is "true" that is untrue to Christ's word and testimony. Belief in a lie will not save a man. A church may be dead, and yet true; but it cannot be disloyal to the teaching of Christ and be His church. No false church can represent the Master. She is a lie.

Truth affects practice. It is bound to do so. It makes a vast difference in the life of a man as to what he believes. Too often a liberal faith is an excuse for a liberal life. A very close connection is observed in the epistles between "a clear conscience" and "departure from the faith." The moment a man begins to have an elastic conscience, he begins to stretch his faith to accommodate it.

We are exhorted by some people today "to be hospitable to all truth." And in our endeavour to do so, we have, perhaps all unconsciously, "entertained the devil unawares." We do not have to prove *all* things. Some things are static. They have passed the experimental stage. The multiplication table, and certain principles in mathematics, for example. So with regard to the Christian Faith. Some doctrines are permanently settled; they are static. Much of what is called "liberalism" is "lying." Any deviation from Christ and His Truth is lying. And what shall be the doom of liars? Well, Revelation 21:8 is a passage well worth looking up in this connection.

"And hast not grown weary." That is wonderful. After all their labour, toil, patience, and zeal for orthodoxy, they had not grown weary in it all; they still had a reserve of strength; they had not grown weary in the struggle, let alone of talking about it; they were not weary or spent with their labours, nor had they given up because of the stress and strain. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavyladen, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." They had come to Him and found it so. We hear many today saying: "O, we are so tired of the struggle of orthodoxy versus heterodoxy, and fundamentalism versus modernism. Let us call a truce. Let us have peace." But there can be no rest, cessation from struggle, nor peace so long as error is seeking to usurp the place of truth.

"Thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate." Here is another point of commendation. What is meant by *Nicolaitanism?* Some think it is the sin of the rule of the clergy over the laity, and that when the Church of Christ submitted to that rule it was untrue to Christ. While holding to the universal priesthood of all believers in the Biblical sense of that word, I cannot feel that the sin referred to in this verse is that of the division of the Church into clergy and laity. I believe in the ordained ministry of the Church. I believe, of course, that there are men in the ministry whom God never called into it. They do not have "the gift of ministry." I do not believe the Holy Ghost calls any man into an office for which he has no qualification. Having said that, I come now to my understanding of the term, Nicolaitanism. I believe it to be similar to the sin of Balaam; that what Balaamism is in the Old Testament, that Nicolaitanism is in the New

Testament sense. It is the awful delusion that worldliness cannot harm the covenant child of God; that a Christian can flirt with the world and not be defiled by it. In other words, the church at Ephesus had kept itself uncontaminated from the world. It knew that "no man can serve two masters;" that "ye cannot serve God and mammon;" that "if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." We shall come across this error in our study of one of the other letters. We will deal more fully with it there.

There was much in Ephesus to lead Christians into this sin of worldliness. There was the temple of Diana; the great theatre, and the stadium. Ephesus was also a stronghold of spiritualism and the occult. Just what attitude they took towards these things is shown in the account in Acts 19:9. There was no compromise in any way.

The Complaint; Censure: "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." At first sight it seems somewhat difficult to say just what was the trouble with the church at Ephesus. Possessing all the magnificent qualities and characteristics we have already enumerated and being worthy of such an encomium as that which the Christ Himself passed upon them we are quite surprised to learn that there was anything worth while to censure in such a church. Is there in these words a gentle rebuke? Can a rebuke be gentle? Can words heal while they wound, and soothe while they rouse? Can the North wind be biting, and yet cooling? Can the breeze from the South be balmy? May a father's rod and a mother's tears be combined in a gentle rebuke? If so, then all this is what we have here.

Is Jesus here reflecting or rebuking, or both? When

some words are spoken you are led to think of the speaker; others, of yourself. These words of Jesus would seem to pass from one to the other. That there is in these words an element of complaint seems clear. But who can find fault with the One who makes the complaint? We may read both attraction and repulsion in them, and feel both. Here is love in tears—just like Jesus weeping over Jerusalem. And, O, what a rebuker He is! How He has already disarmed them by the many nice things He has said about them and what they had done for Him and His cause. He would have them know that He is not arbitrary, capricious, fault-finding, nor a hard taskmaster. He has most deeply appreciated all they have done for Him—and He has expressed that appreciation. He praises ere He reproves. Was there ever such a wonderful Master to work for? Note His gentle rebuke:

"*I have somewhat against thee.*" "Somewhat." Just what it is He does not say. He will do so later, but not now; not right away. He just tells them that there is a lack somewhere. That is a gentle, friendly way of expressing it. He would rebuke them as a friend. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend." Perhaps He was desirous of impressing on them the fact that this "somewhat" or "something" which He saw may not have seemed much to the world, nor even perchance to them. But to Him who sees things as they are and whose "eyes are like a flame of fire," this "something" may, if not corrected, become everything. Jesus sees *multum in parvo*.

What Jesus sees may not seem much in the sight of man; perhaps, as yet, it is visible to God only. Doubtless, as yet, the fault had not assumed any definite form and shape, as some sins do. It may have been a state and

condition, an absence of something, rather than a tangible action or mode of wrongdoing. Some sins, you know, are in liquid form; others are in solids. As a rule we do not worry over liquid sins; it is only when they assume the solid form that we begin to take notice. But Jesus, that great heart-searcher, is concerned with sins in liquid form. He trembles, not so much when He sees blood on the hand of the murderer, as when He sees the hateful thought, that leads to murder, in the heart. Sins of disposition—those of which man seems to take small notice—concern Jesus greatly; at times, one thinks, more even than sins of the flesh—which man censures so severely. Yet is it not true that a man's disposition casts its reflection on all he says and does? The licentious we ostracise; the ill-tempered we bear with. The one we call a sin; the other, a matter of disposition. An evil disposition is a sinful thing. Let us not forget that in our diagnosis of spiritual matters. "The carnal *mind* is enmity against God," as well as the carnal nature.

What Jesus found fault with in the Ephesian church was something that affected the heart rather than the head. Intellectually, theoretically, theologically shall we say, Ephesus was all right. But when Jesus put His stethoscope on the heart He quickly detected defection. There was a heart leakage. The doctrine of the church was sound. It was worthy of praise that they had denounced heresy. It was to their credit that they felt themselves bound by their covenant with the Christ to resist the world, flesh and devil, and hate the deeds of the Nicolaitanes. But that was not sufficient. All this could be done and still the fire of love on the altar of heart be going out. It may be quite possible to hate what Christ hates without loving what He loves, to forget to love the Nicolaitanes while hating their deeds. In

our work for Christ it is quite possible to alienate rather than win. Some fight to bleed; the Christian fights to win. It is in this spirit that we are to contend for the faith. We are to raise, not crush those who may be only mistaken in their views of truth and are not avowed enemies to it. Would it not have been a grand thing if the Church of Christ throughout all the centuries had remembered this? So it was a declension in the heart, a leaky valve, a spot on the lungs that Christ discovered in this church. And that "something" is, apparently, more to Him than "works," "labour," "toil," or orthodoxy, for it is the very thing that gives character and worth to these things, so vital in themselves. . . . "And if I . . . have not love, I am nothing."

Soon the world would see what now He alone saw. Like secret disaffection between husband and wife—it cannot long remain a matter between themselves. The children will see it, and then it will become patent to the world. The tree cannot long remain after the sap has gone from it, nor an engine run much distance when the steam or gas is shut off. It was "not many days after" the prodigal became dissatisfied in heart that the world knew about it. So pastor, Christian worker, disciple of Christ, you are omitting the quiet hour of prayer and communion with your Master; your Bible is a neglected book; there is decline in the things of the soul and laxity in spiritual matters. It is true that your members do not know of it yet, pastor; it is true, Christian, that your fellow-workers in Christian service are ignorant of your spiritual neglect. They think that you are the spiritual man you used to be, or seem to be. But some day, some day, some day—and God pity us when that day comes—we shall fall, and then the continued lack and deceptions of our lives will be revealed. Let us look to these signs

of unconscious decay. "Gray hairs are upon him and he knoweth it not." Some day that secret heart disaffection will cost you quite dearly, it will break your heart, and you will bewail it with sorrow.

"*Thou hast left thy first love.*" Let us look at these words a moment and catch their meaning. We shall then better understand what was the sin of the Ephesian church. The word for "love" here used is an affectionate one. It expresses delight, desire, longing, devotion, even a lovefeast.

"First" love. What kind of love is that? It means first in time, place, dignity, order, the chief and the principal thing, the first thing in importance, as formerly. What Christ is complaining of is that He does not now have that place. "If any man love father or mother more than me." Something, someone was being loved "more than me."

What is suggested by "left"? It signifies to suffer to die, to breathe out, to relax, to become less intense, to slight and neglect, to decline, to be deserted, to live alone. All this is what had happened to the Ephesian Christians.

Here is the language of wounded friendship, of estrangement that had been undeserved. It is a love that has been unrequited and is hurt that is here speaking. It was not a love that had been "lost," but that had been "left." It was not a love that had been turned into hate, nor of an affection whose stream had been totally dried up, that Jesus complains. No, the stream of affection had not wholly dried up; but it was ebbing; it had lost the freshness of early days; it was below its former temperature. There had been the loss of half a heart. There existed a divided love which once was entire. Any other loss would seem easier to bear. Other things are easy compared with this. Jesus desires our entire

love, and is disappointed if He loses any part of it. He not merely loves; He wants to be loved. He is lonesome for our love and affection. How valuable, then, must these be to Him when He so grieves over their loss! He once had such fulsome love from the Ephesian Christians. They had shown it in the early days of their conversion. But now the star is growing dim, the light is slowly fading, the warmth of love is cooling. The Ephesus of *now* is not the Ephesus of *then*. And that fact breaks the heart of the Son of God.

The church at Ephesus was not less orthodox than before, nor did it show the slightest hospitality to heterodoxy. It hated the deeds of the Nicolaitanes even as formerly. To all appearances there was no cessation in labour, work, toil. Love had not turned to hate. The church had not renounced Christ. It had not lost its love for Him. *It just loved Him less*—and O, *that* hurt Him so. There was a time when the motto of the Ephesian church was: "Thou, O Christ, art all I want." He completely and fully satisfied. Now it was Christ—*plus*. He did not, apparently, completely satisfy. Something else, someone else was needed. And that hurt.

Perhaps "first love" may be illustrated by comparing it with the love of engagement as contrasted, in many cases, with the love of later married life. Jeremiah, it seems to me, has reference to a "first love" on the part of Israel for Jehovah: "Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the Lord, I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousal (or perhaps engagement), when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. Israel was holiness unto the Lord, the first fruits of his increase." It is not our purpose to make an invidious comparison or contrast between the love of engagement and later married

life to the disparagement of the latter, for it is quite possible that it may be stronger and much deeper, and doubtless is in many cases. But, alas, in very many other instances it is not; indeed, it is far from it, as experience and observation so often make apparent. The experiences of the spiritual life are in many ways like those in the natural life and ofttimes splendidly illustrate them. So it may be in this instance. Let us see if it is so.

Do you recall your engagement days? Woe be to any rival in those days. Perhaps it is permitted, yea and encouraged now. Do you remember when your sweetheart dropped her handkerchief or umbrella, how speedy and alert you were as you immediately stooped to pick it up. But now, well, wife usually picks it up herself. Could you ever think of letting your betrothed or bride alight from the car without you going before and assisting her? Assuredly not. But does your wife precede you now and get off the car unassisted? Do you remember how you used to bring flowers and candy to your sweetheart? How long is it since you brought any to your wife? I am not seeking, I say, to make any disparaging contrasts. Nevertheless we all are conscious that such exist. Do you not recall how that after you had said "good-night" to your sweetheart, immediately on your arrival home you sat down and wrote a twelve-page letter, and then, before the next day had passed, another long letter? That was fine; perhaps as it ought to be; certainly as it was. But how about it now that that young lady has been for years your wife? Is there any difference? "O," you say, "you would not expect a fellow to keep that up all his life, would you?" Well, I am not discussing that question. I am just stating a difference that too often exists.

The love of engagement is a wonderful thing! Then

"all is gold;" and "it takes no more for two to live than it does for one." First love is blind to difficulties. Tell it of mountains in the way of accomplishment of purpose, and it cries out, "I can fly." Speak of rivers that need to be crossed, and it proclaims, "I can swim." A right, royal force is first love. O, the romnace, the venturesomeness, the daring of it! What risks it will take, what burdens bear, what responsibilities assume! If there are any difficult tasks in the church to be performed give them to those whose hearts are filled with "first love" to Christ.

It would seem as though Christ is sending the Ephesian Christians back to the time of their conversion, when they experienced a fresh sense of His love in their forgiveness and their marriage union with them. He would remind them of that and blames them for forgetting it. Do you remember the great love, joy and gratitude that welled up in your heart when you first found Christ as your Saviour? All things seemed new. Christ was new; the Word was new and you looked at it in a new light; worship was a new thing and you loved it; the world seemed like a new realm of beauty and you revelled in it as it seemed to shine in the beauty of its Creator. Sin was gone, and with it all fear. To love was all, and you loved everybody and everything. The day dawned with joy, and the night was full of songs. How tender, how teachable you were then; in conscience how true; in works, how dutiful; in prayer, how earnest; in service, how willing! It was the time of your espousal to your Lord; those were the days of early married love.

Without "first love," labour is vain; faith is impotent; hope is dead. In the first epistle to the Thessalonians we have, inferentially, a picture of a church in its first love. Some irregularities in doctrine there were, to be sure, but

a great heart enthusiasm. The apostle in describing it says he remembers without ceasing "their work of faith, labour of love, patience of hope." Here are the very same things that are commended in Ephesus, yet how different! Here are "work, labour, and patience," but "faith, love and hope" are omitted in connection with them.

Is that what is happening in your life, my Christian friend? You, perhaps, have "works, labour, and patience," but is "faith, hope, and love" there, too? The letter you received was written on fine paper, embossed, scented, sealed, monogramed. But it brought you no joy. Instead it gave you pain and sorrow. Why? Because of the way it began and ended. Something was missing. It was so different from the letters you received in the days of love and engagement.

The loss of first love is a most serious one. Paul, in that wonderful thirteenth of First Corinthians, tells us that without it all our faith, knowledge, understanding of the mysteries of the Bible, as well as our self-denial and self-sacrifice, are as nothing. It is the absence of "first love" that leads to hypocrisy. We begin to pose then. We want to seem to be the real thing when in reality we are not. God doesn't pose; He doesn't have to. The devil poses; he is a hypocrite and would go through the motions of reality in order to be deemed real.

The Bible speaks of three kinds of works: good, dead and wicked works. *Good works* are such as are done in faith and love and in the name of Jesus. *Wicked works* are those performed by such as are led by Satan and are living in sin. *Dead works* are those performed by good people but without love to Christ and God. So the Christian who has lost his first love for Christ may render service but it is simply a question of going through the

motions. In Christianity everything depends upon motive and foundations. At the close of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus teaches us a wonderful lesson. He draws our attention to two builders—one who built on sand and the other on rock. What Jesus would lay emphasis on here is not the buildings erected—for perhaps they both were alike, and deemed equally permanent, until the time of testing came; then it was revealed that the thing that counted was the foundation.

When there is a slackening of those qualities for which first love is commended; when a man has to drag himself to duty; when prayer and worship and work for Christ are turned from, in heart if not in act; when temptation once resisted and spurned now approaches and solicits and is suffered to do so—then our love for Christ has surely suffered and waned, our first love is at the extreme danger point.

The Command; Warning: "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen; and repent, and do the first works." Remember—repent—return. This is the threefold warning and command to the church that had lost its first love for Christ.

"Remember." Remember what "first love" made you do. The world tells us that to be happy we should learn to forget; Jesus here says the opposite. Memory is better than a blank. We are here called upon to remember what we were and used to do. We are "to be remembering," to be constantly making mention and speaking of these things.

The Ephesian Christians had once lived in a certain atmosphere from which they had "fallen out." The epistle to the Ephesians is called the epistle of "inness," because it sets forth the abiding life, that life which is

characterized by the continual indwelling in Christ. Paul had exhorted the Ephesians to live this kind of a Christian life and evidently they had obeyed his injunction. Something had interfered with that experience of "inness," however, and they seem satisfied with a position of "nearness" instead. Perhaps they sang as we oft-times do: "Draw me nearer, nearer, nearer, blessed Lord." But it was *inness* rather than *nearness* they needed. That was the truth that John also had proclaimed in his epistle in which we find the word "abide" and its equivalent some twenty times. They were exhorted to abide in the Word, light, love, Him, God, the Spirit, etc. These Ephesian Christians had known that "apart from me ye can do nothing," and that only by abiding in Christ could they bring forth fruit pleasing to God. Nearness will produce only work-righteousness; fruit produced by our own effort. He that hath learned to abide in Christ hath found "rest from his labours," he has ceased from such works. He abides in the very heart of God.

It was evidently from such a height as this that the Ephesian Christians had fallen, from such an environment they had "fallen out." Jesus reminds them of this and exhorts them to return to that quality of experience. Their trouble, you see, concerned both height and atmosphere. They had fallen off or from something; they had ceased to live in an atmosphere once theirs. They were not cast down or out; they had fallen out and had been cast down by their own fault.

Jesus would have them take a retrospective view of their spiritual experience—what "first love" led them to do. He would have them recall the place that Bible reading and devotion had then, and its place in their lives now. He would have them remember how ardent was

their prayer life when the first knew Him, and how there had come a slackening. He would remind them of the passion for the souls of the lost they used to have when His redemptive love first thrilled their hearts, and how indifferent they now seemed to be. He would have them call to mind the little bits of out of the way service they used to do for Him without being asked or assigned and of the forced service now. He would have them dwell on the freeness with which they contributed of their means to His cause and their present lack of liberality. He would have them not forget how sensitive they used to be to the advance of temptation and how Satan was thwarted on his first approach. In such a manner would Christ seek to bring this church back to its former love.

One sometimes wonders if that is not just what some of us need to do today, if we feel that we have lost our passion and first love for Christ? Do you recall the place that prayer used to have in your life when you first became a Christian? How you would get up very early in the morning to keep "the morning watch" and commune with your heavenly Father before you saw the face of man and came into contact with a world of temptation? But how about it now? Do you still keep the morning watch?

Then there is the matter of your Bible—its reading and study. My, how you loved that Book in the early days of your Christian life! How you loved to pore over its pages. How you marked it, perhaps with pencil or ink of different colours. Opening it, one can see lines, markings leading from one passage to another. One does not need a concordance to find the promises in that Bible. But how is it now? Let us look at your Bible of the present day. Alas, it is neat and clean; scarce a marking in it. It is well kept; too well kept. A clean Bible is

said to indicate a lean Christian. You used to spend considerable time a day with your Bible. How is it now? A chapter a day? When you prayed you would agonize, perhaps, on your face, before God; you surely would kneel on both knees. How about it now? "O," you say, "the posture of the body has nothing to do with prayer; one can pray as well standing as kneeling." And so you kneel on one knee or stand in prayer; or perhaps you say your prayers in bed.

Do you remember how you loved souls when you first found Christ as your Saviour? Why, you would not think of going out of a meeting without speaking to some one about his soul; and if you did, you would ask God to forgive you for your neglect and indifference. Do you remember that? But now? well it's different, isn't it? You can go in scores of meetings, never talk to a soul and not have a twinge of conscience about your neglect?

Then there is the matter of sin: do you remember how sensitive you were to sin in those days of first love for Christ? Perhaps you may recall an instance in which you fell into a sin. It broke your heart that you had grieved the Christ who loved you and gave Himself for you. You knelt by your bed, and with strong crying and tears you confessed your sin and begged forgiveness; you cried yourself to sleep that night. But how long is it since you wept over sin? Now if you commit a sin, in a matter of fact way you say, "O, God forgive my sin and I promise not to do it again," and you go on your way as though nothing out of the ordinary had happened. There was a day when you could not have done that. Of course, true repentance may exist aside from tears. But that is not the point just here. Let us face the facts. How long since you wept over sin?

Do you remember how sensitive your conscience was

to Christ and His blessed will in those days. Has there been a change here? Can it be that things you could not have done in those days without a heartbreak, and without feeling they were sinful, you can do and do today without a twinge of conscience? Do you solicit the temptation—in that you put yourself in the way of it—to indulge things which were repulsively sinful to you in those early days of your Christian life?

Of course we go to church. But do we go as we used to—with joyful alacrity? Or do we go wearily, and because we fear the opinions of others if we do not go? Certainly we have family altar. Is it as hearty and regular as formerly or is it a mere perfunctory affair and intermittent? Yes, we engage in Christian work, more or less. But is it under the inspiration of the Spirit as in former days, or as a mere matter of form instead of with the consciousness of the fact that you are an ambassador of the court of heaven and that you are in the service of the King? Or perhaps you engage in it because it is a means of livelihood to you.

No, of course you have not renounced Christ, but have you come down from the lofty pedestal and the noble elevation of your love for Him? You have not ceased to love Christ; but do you love Him less than formerly? Thou hast zeal, orthodoxy, courage, patience, perseverance; but is thy love waning? No, you are not yet a castaway; but are you living on a low plane, in the valley instead of on the heights as of yore?

But why carry this self-examination further? Every Christian understands just what is meant here. And it is to this that Christ calls the Ephesian Christians.

How is "first love" lost? This is a difficult question to answer for it may come in different ways to different people. If, however, after examination we can discover

in our own case, how it came about, we can readily get back to that blessed condition of devotion to Christ.

Perhaps some *rival* to Christ came into your life. As a rule when a husband's affection begins to wane, his wife usually looks for "another woman in the case," and vice versa in the case of the decline of the affections of a wife. So it may be in the case of the Christian and Christ. The world is Christ's rival. "Demas hath forsaken me," said Paul, "having loved this present world." "Whosoever will be a friend of the world is an enemy of God." The world is a great flirt. With its "lust of the flesh, its lust of the eye, and its vainglory of life" it ofttimes wins the Christian away from Christ. Examine your life and see if this has been the cause of your defection in devotion to your Master.

Then, again, *spiritual pride* may have cast a man down from the height of his fellowship with the Saviour. How unworthy one felt when he knelt first as a sinner at the feet of the Saviour, asking for pardon.

> *"O, Saviour, I have naught to plead,*
> *On earth beneath or heaven above;*
> *But just my own exceeding need,*
> *And thy exceeding love."*

Yes, that was how we felt then. But perhaps we have come to consider ourselves as of some importance in Christian service. A kind of self-sufficiency may have taken possession of us. If so, then we need to remember what we were and come to Christ again as poor and worthless creatures. It is said of David, the sweet Psalmist of Israel, that when he was king he always kept a little room in the palace, separated from the rest, into which he alone went frequently. Inside the room were his shepherd clothes, his rod, staff, sling and stones, and

his lute. He would never forget what he was when God found him and honoured him with the kingship. Do we thus remember what we were?

Perhaps, further, there has been a *laxity* in keeping up these spiritual exercises which have meant so much in preserving the sweet fellowship enjoyed with Christ. They tell us that if, in married life, there is failure to observe the little courtesies that characterized engagement and early married days, there is likely to be a decline in love. Are you keeping up your little courtesies to your divine Lover, the Christ.

"*Repent and return.*" To have dropped from a spiritual height to a lower level and to be content to live on that level is sin and something to be repented of. To be satisfied with a Christian experience less loving and intense than what you formerly enjoyed is a matter for regret and repentance. To have allowed the things which first love for Christ led you to do, to drop out of your life is a sinful thing. To have left an evangelical faith which made you evangelistic for a modernistic creed that has robbed you of your enthusiasms for Christ is wicked and calls for repentance. All these are cause for the rending of the heart in sorrow, penitence, humiliation, confession and shame.

Repent! Change your mind about these things. Get back to your old faith. Come to your senses again. Recall what you were when you first came to Christ and that you are just that today, and repent for loss of first love. Let the fountains of the deep be broken up; let the heart be rent; let the tears flow—that will not hurt, for tears have wet a holier eye and stained a more sacred cheek than ours; and that for the sins of others, too, not His own. Give up that rival, put away that idol, forsake that sin. Reconstruct, re-form, re-make your life on the

basis of former experience with Christ. "Do the first works over again." Do the things that you used to do when you were in your state of first love to Christ. You know what they were. Recall them. Get back to the "faith of your fathers, living still." Maintain freshness of testimony and boldness in confession of Christ. Go after souls as you used to. Twice the Ephesians are called upon to "repent," so forcibly would Christ drive home the charge. There is no substitute for repentance under such circumstances. This is the message the Church of Christ of today needs. Repentance has been likened to the sharp needle piercing the hole through which the silk thread of the Gospel may be sewed. It is not to be overlooked that this command to "repent" is addressed to the whole Church.

The Threat; Warning: "Or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of its place, except thou repent." Christ threatens instant and immediate punishment unless repentance takes place. The words, "I come quickly," while doubtless referring to the second coming of Christ, may, and probably do have in this instance, a reference to a visitation upon the Ephesian church which would be swift and sure unless it repented. The words may be understood in the sense of "I am coming now," "I am on my way." Perhaps the Master had in mind some sudden action by some earthly calamity which would bring them to their senses. God sometimes works that way. Or, perhaps, the words may refer to death, for we know that sometimes God takes useless Christians away by death, in order that they "may not be condemned with the world." A careful reading of John 15:1-8 and 1 Corinthians 11:27-30 will, I feel sure, bear out this thought. Then again, Christ may

accomplish this purpose by letting circumstances themselves reveal true conditions and thus bring shame and humiliation upon ourselves. We go along in our cold, backslidden way, until one day we fall. The newspapers, perhaps, take up the story and thus shame is brought upon us and our loved one. In this way, ofttimes, we are brought to our senses and back to Christ.

What! remove the candlestick from such an influential church as Ephesus? Certainly. Why not? The fact is that it *was* removed. A church or Christian that is loveless and unlovely cannot represent Christ to the world. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples; if ye have love one for another." Love is the token. Without love—well, read 1 Corinthians 13 and learn that without it all that we are and do is worse than useless: "clanking brass and a tinkling cymbal."

Ephesus has been for centuries, and is now, in ruins. The church from the corridors of which thousands cried, "Great is the Christ," has now passed away. The Cross was supplanted by the Crescent. I visited Ephesus a few years ago, and what did I find: "A few heaps of stones; some miserable mud cottages occasionally tenanted by Turks; without a single Christian inhabitant residing there. Not only was the church at Ephesus removed but even now the bishop of Ephesus resides at Magnesia, twenty-five miles northeast of Smyrna. This is all that remains of the once prosperous church at Ephesus of which Paul was the founder; Epaphras, Tychicus and Trophimus the local preachers; Aquilla, Priscilla and Apollos preachers; Mary, the mother of our Lord, a member; John the apostle, an elder; and Timothy, the pastor. Ephesus is now 'a most solemn, forlorn spot.'"

The epistle to the Ephesians is read the world over, but there is no Christian in Ephesus to read it. They did

not "return" to their "first love" and so were removed. This church was removed, not because it did not have good qualities—for as we have seen in Christ's commendation of it, it did—but because it failed in the vital thing for which a church and a Christian exists, and which it is expected to do, namely, to give light, to show to the world the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. When a church or Christian ceases to perform that function then there is no place for such, and they may be removed without loss to the cause of Christ.

O, what a lesson for the Church, the Christian, and the preacher! My brother in the ministry, God can do without you if you have lost your first love for Christ. A phonograph can then do the work you now do. Remember that "God removed Saul and put up David." It is not our cleverness, our scholarship, or doings, not even our correct views of doctrine that enlighten the world with the knowledge of God and save a dying race. It is our love; our "first love" for the Master, then for each other, and then for the unsaved world. This is what counts; and if a man has not got that he had better be out of the ministry; indeed, God will remove him in one way or another.

So many a church has been removed, if not on earth, then in heaven, for a church may have some standing on earth and have no place as a candlestick in heaven. There are lots of churches thus situated. Of course some are closed down here; but some are still open, and going through the motions, but have no standing in heaven. Their candlestick up there has been removed. A factory, lodge, fraternal or charity organization may turn out the same kind of product many a church turns out. What right, then, has a church to exist if it is not doing a work that no other organization can possibly do—namely, the

saving of souls? It has no right to exist. It should be removed as a useless candlestick. And in heaven it is thus removed, even though the building remains standing on earth and services are "going on as usual."

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." Behold, then, the solemnity of the appeal! Do not resist the Spirit of God. Give ear to the Spirit's warning. Bend the heart and mind to it. Listen constantly to what the Spirit *is* saying—not to the Ephesian church alone, but "to the churches"—all of them. The condition that existed in the church at Ephesus is likely to be found in churches everywhere, hence the general command to listen to the voice of the Spirit.

The Promised Reward: "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." The promise is to the "overcomer." That is a fighting word; it subdues, conquers, vanquishes, prevails and comes off conqueror. God's rewards are never to the lazy, shiftless and indolent. Those who would win in the conflict with sin will need to wage a severe warfare. Sin is a matter of the heart, and that always indicates a most severe struggle. Were the matter one of the head and intellect merely it would be comparatively easy. But where the affections are concerned it is a serious matter.

But the victory is assured to faith. Jesus said, "Be of good courage; I have overcome the world." So can you, because "as He is so are we in this world," and "greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world." You can victor be in every trying hour. Have faith in God. Put on the whole Christian armour. "This is the victory (the pledge and earnest) that overcometh the world, even

this faith of ours." So the Ephesian backslider may become the Ephesian overcomer.

It is to "the overcomer" that this wonderful promise is made. Not to the coward. Twice is that fact stated: "To the one overcoming, *to him,*" not to the defeated, the fearful and cowardly (Rev. 21:8), "will I give to eat of the tree of life."

"*The tree of life.*" We are here at once taken back to the Garden of Eden. There we behold the tree of life in the midst of that first paradise. Man, because of his sin, was driven out of the garden and refused any participation in the blessings accruing from that tree. Cherubim were set at the gates of Eden to keep the way to the tree of life. God, in His mercy and love for man, did not want man to partake of the tree of life and live for ever —in the sinful condition in which he then found himself. No, God had something better in store for man than that. He would keep that tree for man until, in his redeemed and sinless condition, he could partake of it and live for ever. So here we find the tree of life. We have not seen or heard of it since the third chapter of the Bible. Here is the promise of it. In the last chapter we see man actually participating in this blessing. But it is remarkable that after reading of the tree of life in the third of the 1,189 chapters of the Bible we do not hear of it again until here. It is mentioned three times in Genesis and three times in Revelation. So you see the Bible ends as it began—with a perfect, Edenic condition. The book of Revelation is the only book that could, logically, close the canon of the Bible. All the tangled threads of prophecy, prose, poetry, history, promise, type, etc., find their shuttle in the last book of the Bible—"the Revelation."

By "the tree of life" is meant, of course, eternal life, life in a perfected and blessed state with God. So, too,

Christ Himself is and becomes the Tree of Life, even as He is "the hidden manna," and "the bright and morning star." Jesus satisfies. "Jesus is more than all to me." We live upon Him. He sustains and satisfies us. "He that eateth me shall never hunger."

Here is a picture of the highest possible enjoyment. One wonders if the Ephesian Christians ever contrasted it with what they were called upon to give up for Christ —for the affections that must be crushed, and the loves that must be subdued when such rival "first love" to Christ.

Note: "I will give to eat." I, with My own hand. Is it not He who "girdeth himself" that He may feed His people whom He has caused to sit down at the wedding feast? What an honour! It reminds us of the foot-washing scene when He, the Master, washed the disciples' feet. "I am among you as one that serveth."

"*The paradise of my God.*" Originally the word "paradise" or Garden, used to indicate a place where wild beasts were kept for hunting purposes, but Christianity (as in other instances like the word "humility," a word despised by classical Greek writers but sanctified by Christ) has dignified it, just as in your bosom and mine He can take out that fiery passion and put instead His gentle, compelling, satisfying love. So "Paradise" came to mean a delightful garden with beautiful trees, an Eden of God, Jerusalem the golden, Immanuel's Land, the Homeland.

V

THE CHURCH AT SMYRNA

THE WITNESSING AND SUFFERING CHURCH

"And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive; I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death."—REVELATION 2: 8-11.

The Address: "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write." Smyrna was situated about fifty miles north of Ephesus. It is said to have now a population of about 120,000, and was a flourishing city when I was there a few years ago. It has since been pillaged and burned by the Turks (in 1922), so that a considerable part of the city must have been destroyed.

Smyrna was noted for its famous hill which had a crown of buildings encircling it, all of which presented a most magnificent view from the harbour. There was a citadel situated on the hill; it was called "The Golden Lined Palace." The temple of Cybele and the Acropolis adjoined the palace. These buildings are said to have girdled the hill and glittered like a crown; so Smyrna was sometimes called "the crown city." Then, again, the citadel itself was called "the crown of Smyrna."

Religiously, Smyrna was headquarters for the worship of Dionysius, the god of the productive and intoxicating powers of nature. Much was made of the vine in Smyrna, which was said to yield fruit twice a year. We know Smyrna as noted for "figs." Dionysius was said to be the god who dispensed joy and fertility. Annually the mock death, burial and resurrection of Dionysius was celebrated. It was rehearsed and practiced frequently during the year and then on one day there was the great feast and the mock death and burial of the god were celebrated. The priests who officiated at this ceremony were given crowns.

Smyrna prided itself on its faithful adherence to all treaties and alliances. Cicero, in speaking of it, calls it, "The city of our most faithful and ancient allies." It was noted also for its firm adherence to its religious ceremonies and observances. As we proceed in the study of this letter we will see how all these things are referred to and spiritual use made of them, thus testifying to the historicity of these seven churches of Asia. These facts show not only "point of contact" but also bear witness to historicity. There *were* seven such churches.

From the Christian point of view Smyrna is also important. The Mahommedans call it the "Infidel City," because it has so many Christians in it. What a contrast with Ephesus, which does not have one Christian residing in it. The reason for this we shall see later. Indeed, Smyrna may be said to be the only one of the seven churches remaining today. Polycarp, the Christian witness, was martyred here. So we have a Christian church and "the synagogue of Satan" side by side in this city. This will reveal much of interest as we proceed.

The Speaker: "These things saith the First and the Last,

which was dead, and is alive." The significance of this title is seen when we recall the historical and religious facts connected with this city which we have just recorded. Especially is this title fitting when we recall that it speaks of One who *really* died, and *really* rose again. Jesus actually "*Became* dead" (R. V.). It was no mock death, burial and resurrection which our Saviour passed through. The death and resurrection of the god Dionysius was a sham indeed; the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh, was an absolute reality. No mock Saviour is He.

We can readily see how the announcement of this fact would give real comfort and joy to believers who were suffering much persecution, yea, and even death, for Christ. And further, it is to be noted that He is said to have power over "the second death," the meaning of which we shall consider under the "Rewards" of this letter: "he shall not be hurt of the second death."

"*The First and the Last.*" He is the *origin* of all things. He is before and prior to all things; He is chief, principal in importance and in order, in dignity, in time. Here is claim to absolute deity! "He that cometh after me is preferred before me; for he was before me," said the Baptist, in his testimony concerning Christ. "Before Abraham was (came into being), I am" (I always was; I never came into being; there never was a time when I was not existent). Jesus did not begin at Bethlehem. No writer of the Gospels ever claims that. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God." "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever." "And he is before all things, and by him all things consist."

He is the "*Last,*" also, as well as the "First," the Omega as well as the Alpha, the end as well as the beginning. He is the end, the extremity, the consummation of

all things. He is the one who puts an end to, abolishes; One who completes a thing, at last, at length.

Now let us see what relation these thoughts have to the condition of the Church in Smyrna. Let us remind ourselves, as we shall see more fully later, that the Christians here were undergoing the most frightful persecution. Those who believe that the seven churches represent seven periods of time since Christ and until the end, place the Smyrna period at A. D. 303-313, the fierce ten years' persecution under the bloody reign of Domitian. No words can adequately describe these times. But even in John's time (95-100) the Christians in Smyrna were suffering. Now let us look at these titles of the Son of God and see how they bear on these conditions:

"I am the *First.*" All things have their origin in Him. Is it true, then, that nothing happens *by chance,* is unknown or unforeseen by Him, not even these terrific trials through which this little, brave church was passing? Is that what it means? Should the Christian always say:

> *"In the centre of the circle*
> *Of the will of God I stand;*
> *There can come no second causes;*
> *All must come from His dear hand."*

Is it true that "His heart hath planned your life and mine"? That "In your journey all through life He will be with you," that "naught can come to you but what His grace allows"? "The cup which my Father hath given me; shall I not drink it?" Was it the Father that put that bitter draught to His Son's lips, or permitted it to be put there? "Simon, Satan hath desired to have you, that he might sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for thee." Then Jesus knew all about that beforehand? Is it true that Satan could not put a finger on Job until God

permitted him to do so, and then he could go only so far? Is it true that

"God knows my way; He holds the key;
He guides me with unerring hand,"

and that

"Sometime, with tearless eyes I'll see,
And there, up there, I'll understand"?

Does my heavenly Father, does my loving Saviour know all this before it happens to me? And will He be with me through it all, making a way for me to escape or to bear it? Then let me not forget, O Christ, let me not forget this wondrous truth when I am sorely tried.

"When through fiery trials, I cause thee to go,
The rivers of sorrow shall not overflow.
For I will be with thee thy trouble to bless
And sanctify to thee thy deepest distress."

"I am the *Last*." When all others have gone, I will still be with you. When they have left, I remain. Moses and Elijah have gone; Jesus remains. "To the end I remain at your side; in the last extremity, death, I will not desert you; I will be with you even unto the end. Fear not." "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou passest through the fire thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee; for I (Jehovah thy Elohim), the Lord thy God, am with thee." "To the end of the days, I am." How wonderful! Then the last thing mine eyes behold will not be sorrow, sickness, suffering, sin, Satan, death. No; it will be Christ. He has promised never to leave me, never to leave me alone; no, never alone.

"He will keep me 'till the river rolls its waters at my feet;
Then He'll bear me safely over, where the loved ones I shall meet."

"I am the First and I am the Last." Blessed Son of God. This is wonderful! wonderful! very, very wonderful!

"*I became dead, and I live again.*" Yes, it was as though the Saviour said: "I have been all through what you are going through and will yet endure. I know what it is to resist even unto death. They did their worst on me. But I live. See! Revixit! I live! I conquered death. I reign. "Because I live, ye shall live also. I have the keys of death and of Hades. I am death of death and hell's destruction. I'll land you safe on Canaan's side. Do not fear what man can do unto you. Fear not them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. You will pass through death into life even as I have. See, I became dead, yet behold I am alive for evermore." "And I saw the souls of them that had been beheaded for the witness of Jesus and for the Word of God, and they lived and reigned with Christ." They lived! Through death we pass into life. This is the truth that sustained Polycarp in his martyrdom in Smyrna and that has supported all other martyrs of Christ at the time of dying. This was the truth that supported Peter, after Christ had told him that he was going to die a martyr's death; that it was to such an experience he had to look forward; and then said to him, "Follow me." Peter then girt his coat about him—and went with Jesus all the way, even unto death. It is the truth that will support and sustain us in hours of trial and adversity, yea and persecution that may come to us. He knows and He will be with us unto the end.

Commendation: "I know thy tribulation, and thy poverty (but thou art rich), and the blasphemy of them that say they are Jews, and they are not, but are a synagogue of Satan." I have quoted this commendation from the Revised Version, and it will be noted that the words: "I know thy works" are omitted. This is as it should be according to the best Greek texts. These words, "I know thy works," as found in the church at Ephesus, are sufficient to cover their reference to all three of the churches forming the first group of the seven letters.

But is not "suffering" a "*work* of patience"? Are there not times when all one can do is to suffer patiently for Christ; when works are, under the circumstances, absolutely out of the question? We think so. And this was the case here. In Christ's estimation, at any rate, the suffering of the Smyrna church was regarded as a "work of patience." There is such a thing as fellowship in suffering with Christ as well as fellowship in labour with Him. There are times when a man may do less and be more; when activity is out of the question. Suffering or old age may quite easily preclude active service.

Suffering has an important place in the Christian life and experience. Just as we cannot see the rainbow except we see it through falling raindrops, so there are visions of God we cannot see save as we see them through our tears. It is said that that wonderful perfume—the attar of roses—can be extracted only from roses that are plucked in the dark. We darken the cage of the bird when we desire it to sing more sweetly. We put the rosebush in the shade when we want a richer flower. "Every branch in me that beareth fruit, he purgeth it that it may bring forth more fruit." Christ knew the suffering of this church, and that it was for His sake—filling up the cup of His suffering.

"*Thy tribulation.*" That was the form of the suffering. The word "tribulation" suggests the threshing-roller of the Romans, those great stones which ground wheat and forced blood out of grapes. The word indicates also anything that is crowded and confined within narrow limits, that is undergoing pressure and compression, distress, calamity, affliction.

"*I know also the blasphemy* (revilement) of those . . . Jews." This is another one of the forms of the tribulation the saints in Smyrna were enduring. They suffered from the calumny and reproach of the Jews. Such treatment is called "blasphemy" because it is regarded as being against God when it is aimed at God's people. "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" Little did Paul think He was fighting against God when he was making havoc of the church and persecuting the Christians. "Inasmuch as ye did it unto these my brethren, ye did it unto me." "He that receiveth you, receiveth me; and he that rejecteth you, rejecteth me also."

The Christians in Smyrna were sneered at by those who professed to be followers of God. These enemies of the Christ "spoke evil of the noble name by which the Christians were called." The followers of Christ are anathematized. They were referred to as "the worshippers of the crucified ass." They were accused of planning in secret to overthrow Rome. Later that false rumour was believed, and so Christians by the thousands were butchered. Many were covered with pitch, fastened on poles, and set fire to in order to illuminate Rome.

This calumny was hard to bear, seeing it came from professedly religious people. Was it not the false religious teachers among the Jews that "added to Paul's bonds"? "Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one." "In perils by mine own countrymen."

Satan is a counterfeiter. As there is a congregation of the Lord, so there is a congregation of Satan. Satan has his churches, ministers, members, creeds and doctrines. He is a strategist, a methodizer. So we read of the "wiles" or methods of the devil. There is no other way to account for the spread of false "isms" save on this basis. False doctrine is more than a mere turn of mind; it is a deliberately laid plan of the devil to steal souls. Satan is a villifier; so are his followers; that much is clear from this text. Satan himself is called "the accuser of the brethren." His followers are in the same business. Satan means more than an "adversary." It means villifier, traducer, false accuser. He is called Beelzebub, the god of flies, the dung god, because that is where flies congregate—about a dunghill.

Those who engage in gossip, blasphemy, villification are related to Satan. O, the hearts that have been broken as the result of gossip! This is tribulation in a real sense surely. Christians should protect, not criticize and expose, each other. One of the sad things about the war was that so many soldiers were killed by their own comrades because of mistaken barrages. What religious people need to do is to band together to fight a common enemy, not to fight each other.

Christians are exhorted to bear such suffering patiently. Jesus tells them that He knows all about that kind of suffering. "I know the blasphemy, etc. I suffered from it. They said all kinds of false things about me, too, yet I bore it patiently, bore patiently the contradictions of sinners against themselves. And so must you." Peter, in referring to this matter, says: "Who when he was reviled, reviled not again, but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously." His friends betrayed Him. His own loved ones said He was

"beside himself." Perhaps the hardest thing that Jesus had to bear was the betrayal by Judas and the denial by Peter—wounded in the house of His friends. It is said that Jews, professing lovers of God and religion, were present in large numbers at the martyrdom of Polycarp, and to have been foremost in collecting wood with which to burn him alive.

The tribulation through which the Smyrna Christians were passing was the result of their confession of Christ. Smyrna was pre-eminently a witnessing church. To witness means to bring upon oneself the hatred of those who despise Christ. Yet there is naught else the true Christian can do. "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." To withhold our testimony because of suffering and persecution would be to show ourselves cowards rather than "overcomers." To represent Christ in this world is the principal business of the Christian. The man who is a Christian is a Christian first and foremost; all else is secondary. Jesus Christ must be, indeed is to him, "the First"—in dignity, importance, consideration, as He is also "the Last."

"In the hour of trial, Jesus, plead for me;
Lest by base denial, I depart from Thee.
When Thou seest me waver, with a look recall,
Nor for fear or favour, suffer me to fall.
With its bewitching pleasures, would this vain world charm,
Or its sordid treasures, seek to do me harm;
Bring to my remembrance sad Gethsemane,
Or in darker semblance—Cross crowned Calvary."

John came for a witness, and they killed him. Jesus came for a witness, and they killed Him. Paul came for a witness, and they killed him. And they will kill you, too, if you witness. They will not kill you, physically, as they did the early Christians. But they will kill you by

freezing, by ostracism, by insulation and isolation, by sneer and ridicule, by gossip and scandal. This world is not a bit more friendly to Christ than it has ever been. "Marvel not if the world hate you." "If the world hate me, it will hate you also. If ye were of the world, the world would love its own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." Freedom from blasphemy and calumny is at the price of compromise.

"*I know thy poverty.*" The persecution which the Smyrna Christians were enduring took the form also of confiscation of goods. They had been reduced to beggary, to inferior position, to insufficiency because of their loyalty to Christ. A real poverty is indicated, not a spiritual poverty as in the case of the Laodicean church. There, it was wealth of earthly goods and spiritual poverty; in Smyrna it was actual physical poverty and spiritual wealth.

A few years ago a Christian convention was being held in one of our large cities. The speaker of the evening was, for some reason or other, delayed. The chairman of the convention waited for some time, hoping the speaker might appear. However, as the time went on, and the indications were that the speaker was not coming, he invited the Christians present to utilize the time by testifying for Christ. After some pause a little boy arose. He was Jewish in appearance. There was a sad seriousness about him. The audience was impressed with the very presence of the boy and anxiously awaited to hear what he would have to say. This is what he said:

"Jesus, I my cross have taken,
All to leave and follow Thee;
Naked, poor, despised, forsaken,
Thou from hence my all shall be."

And the boy sat down. The audience had been moved. At the close of the meeting some of the people gathered about the boy and learned his story. He was a Jewish boy, and had accepted Christ as his Saviour. His parents had pleaded with him to give up Christ and the Christian religion. When he refused they threatened him with disinheritance and exclusion from the home. Still he refused to renounce Christ. When his parents saw that their son was steadfastly minded to adhere to Christ they cast him out of their home, took away what money and clothes he had, save those he wore, and told him never to let them see his face again. So he was driven out into the world a pauper.

This was exactly what had happened to the Christians in Smyrna. Those were days in which it cost a man something to be a Christian. One sometimes thinks that there might be more Christians, and a better stamp of them, today, if it cost more. Somehow or other we have tried to make religion a thing of sweetmeats. We have taken the condiment out of religion, and the brave, young fellow that is looking for something that tests his metal is not at all attracted by the flowery beds of ease which are offered to him in the name of religion. I am of the opinion that, perhaps, the reason why a number of people today change their religious opinions so easily is because those opinions have cost them nothing. In the early days of Christianity a man's religious opinion cost him confiscation of goods, ostracism and often his very life.

But is not religion "gain"? Yes, it is; always is; but its gain is not always of a material nature; ofttimes it is, for it has the promise both of this life and of that which is to come. But there are times when the profession of Christ means great loss in material matters. Yet those who have suffered such loss for Christ never bemoan it;

they rather rejoice in it, for that loss is gain, even as death is life. Jesus said to them, "I know thy poverty;" but He said also: "but thou art rich."

There are times when Christ still calls for such surrender. I stood some years ago beside a grave in Cairo, Egypt. It was that of a wealthy young Chicago man. In his youth he had given his heart to Christ and his life to the service of foreign missions. He surrendered to his Master's cause the luxuries and ease that a life of wealth well affords, and took, instead, the sufferings of Christ. He went to Egypt in order to master the Arabic language that he might work among Mahommedans and win them to Christ. He cast in his lot with the poor in Cairo. He was smitten with disease as the result of nursing a poor native who was afflicted, and died after a brief stay in Egypt. That young man, William Borden, of sacred memory, felt called upon to surrender a life of ease, a voluntary confiscation of goods, as it were, for Christ's sake. The same was true also of Count Zinzendorf, the founder of the Moravian Church. It is said of him that when his father rebuked him for being a Christian, and threatened to withdraw his allowance if he did not give up his religion, that Zinzendorf came into his father's presence one day, having on a cheap suit of clothes which he had secured from one of the servants. He had one of the servants bring into his father's presence all his magnificent apparel. Beside this apparel Zinzendorf placed his money and jewelry. Having done so, he said to his father: "Father, I have chosen Christ as my all in all. From henceforth I shall not ask nor receive from you one penny for my support. I go out into the world with my Saviour. Where He bids me go, there will I go; His work shall be my joy; His poverty my wealth." I say there are still such surrenders called for;

not always; but sometimes. And the true Christian will be ready and willing to make such surrender should the Christ so indicate.

But, after all, what can we surrender as compared with what Christ gave up for us! Well could He say to the Smyrna Christians: "*I know thy poverty.*" Of course He could. Had He not suffered thus? "The foxes had holes, and the birds of the air had nests, but the Son of Man had not where to lay his head." "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich." Was He not born in a stable and laid in a borrowed manger? Was He not laid, in death, in a borrowed grave? Yes, truly He knew what it was to be poor for the kingdom's sake, and He could and did sympathize with the church at Smyrna. It is when we consider the voluntary surrender of Christ that our surrenders seem meagre.

"I gave my life for thee; my precious blood I shed;
That thou might'st ransomed be, and quickened from the dead.
I gave, I gave my life for thee. What hast thou given for me?

"My Father's house of light, my glory circled throne,
I left for earthly night, for wanderings dark and cold.
I left, I left it all for thee. What hast thou left for me?

"I suffered much for thee—more than thy tongue can tell,
Of bitterest agony, to rescue thee from hell.
I bore, I bore it all for thee. What hast thou borne for me?

"And I have brought to thee, down from my home above,
Salvation full and free, my pardon and my love.
I bring, I bring rich gifts to thee. What hast thou brought to me?"

"*But thou art rich.*" Wonderful words! In the midst of poverty, wealth. "As being poor, yet making many rich." In the midst of their penury and need they were rolling in wealth, opulence, luxury; the church in Smyrna was a millionaire church. 'Tis true the wealth was spiritual, but it was none the less, but rather the more, real because of that. It is only the spiritual wealth that will abide. "The Christian owns all heaven. He walks its streets, not as a foreigner but as owner. The mansions, the angels, the tree of life, the streets of gold, the gates of pearl, Christ, God—all are his. The mansion is his home; the angels are his companions; the tree of life is his shade and nourishment; God is his Father, and Christ is his Brother." The Christian is "rich toward God." It is not in what he possesses of a material nature—although many a true Christian possesses much of such wealth—that makes the Christian, or any man for that matter, rich, but what ministers to the joy of life, peace and satisfaction of heart.

The Christian may be poor in this world's goods and yet immensely wealthy in character and influence, and thus be a greater benediction to the world than many a man with untold millions of gold. Luther was poor, but Rockefeller is a pauper in influence compared with the poor reformer. Wesley was poor—but Ford is a poor mendicant in influence as compared with the father of Methodism. Christ was poor—yet what riches He brought to this world! I have read a story of the death of John Jacob Astor, the founder of the Astor house and millions. It is said that when he was dying his son, or perhaps two sons, were seated by the side of his bed; at the foot of the bed sat his Christian wife. After bestowing millions on his sons, he turned to his wife and said to her: "Wife, sing me that song: 'Come, ye sin-

ners, poor and needy; weak and wounded, sick and sore.'" Think of it—the richest man of his day, as he bade America good-bye and stepped into eternity, asking his wife to sing the song of a beggar! Alas, how much of such poverty there is dwelling in marble halls, dressed in purple and fine linen, and faring sumptuously every day; while in some poor hovel there is the saint of God, wealthy beyond all reckoning in the treasures of the kingdom which wax not old and that pass not away.

The Encouragement and Comfort: "Fear not the things which thou art about to suffer," etc. There is a notable absence of censure or reproof mentioned in connection with this witnessing, suffering, martyr church. So, instead, Christ offers encouragement and comfort and new and larger opportunities to do new and larger things for the kingdom. What in other churches is a command to repent is here an exhortation to comfort.

It is remarkable to note, too, that the exhortation to comfort is in the face of yet greater suffering for His name's sake. They are told not to fear the dark and foreboding experience through which they are about to pass. They are not to let the future affright them. They need not tremble or be amazed or affrighted, nor should they hesitate to meet, and surely they need not flee from "the things that were about to come upon them." Not one—"none" of the things that will happen need cause the least alarm.

Jesus, and so Christianity, dares to foretell the cost of following Him. He, as it were, makes a bid for sacrifice. He will not enlist men under false colours. He would have them know what, following Him, they are to expect. When Garabaldi was about to undertake a perilous campaign, he was desirous of taking with him sol-

diers that were willing to pay the price of even their lives. So he called for volunteers. He called his regiment and made known his purpose and plans, and then he said: "Now I am calling for volunteers. I will not compel any man to go. I can only say this, however, that those who volunteer may expect hunger, thirst, privation, perhaps death. Now, who will volunteer?" How glad he was to see his whole regiment step forward and indicate their willingness to go with him no matter what it might cost.

On one occasion in the life of Jesus, great multitudes were following Him. He turned and looked at them. He knew them. He knew all of them were not sincere in their following. Perhaps they were of the same kind as those to whom He said: "Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled." Jesus read their hearts, and saw among the multitude many who resembled that young man who came to Him on one occasion, and said: "Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest." Jesus just knew he couldn't or wouldn't and so He put a test. He said: "The foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head." Here, before Christ, evidently, was a young man who would not pay the price required for discipleship. So, turning to the great multitude Jesus saw following Him, He announced the conditions of discipleship, saying: "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply,

after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build and was not able to finish. Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace. So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple." Jesus, you see, is here laying down the terms of discipleship. He will not have men mistake the terms. As a King and a Builder He would know the kind of material He can depend on.

No Utopian picture of the Christian life is portrayed before the eyes of these Christians in Smyrna. No immunity from trial is promised. The campaign is not to be an easy one. But, be it long or short, they will come out of it victorious. The Smyrna church was in the midst of suffering, and had been for a long time. Had it not been sufficiently tried? Does she not need to be told now that her experience will be an easy one and that her suffering will be short, that the night of weeping has passed and that the morn of joy was dawning; that her warfare was now accomplished? So we might think. But no. There is to be more suffering; wave after wave of sorrow is yet to sweep over them. Indeed, the sorrow that is to come is to be more awful in its nature than any through which they have yet passed. "Behold" is in the dominant form, and indicates something terrible to follow.

But this coming sorrow is foreknown and foretold and so comes within the permissive will of God, and is, therefore, not to be feared. So the church is exhorted to be

brave, intrepid, manly, magnanimous and endure with invincibility the suffering and sorrow that lay before it. Like Paul, they will be able to say: "And now I go bound in the Spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth that in every city, saying, that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God." That was the kind of fibre of which early Christianity was built. No wonder it conquered!

"*The devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried.*" The persecution is here traced to its real source—the devil. Behind the passions and prejudices of men and their persecutions lies the malignity, hatred and malice of the devil. Jesus saw that clearly in the case of Peter's rebuke, hence, instead of rebuking Peter by name, He rebuked Satan, saying, "Get thee behind me, Satan, for thou art an offense unto me; for thou savorest not the things of God, but the things that be of man." "Satan will try you." In no other way can we account for the malice, hatred and malignity with which men have met and opposed Christ and His religion. I would rather believe in a personal devil thus active than to attribute all this malice and wickedness to the unaided natural heart of man.

But what is temptation from Satan's side is probation from God's side. The program of the devil is known to God—yea, and to God's children, too, for "we are not ignorant of Satan's devices." Christ met the devil in the wilderness and in that struggle He unveiled the devil and his strategems for us. We know Satan's program. There are three items on it: "the lust of the flesh, the lust of

the eyes, and the pride of life." It was thus he tempted our first parents; in a similar manner he tempted Christ in the wilderness, and in the same way he would seek to entrap us (1 John 2:15-17). None can escape temptation. No holiness of character relieves one from the fierce conflict with the great enemy of souls. God had one Son without sin, but no Son without temptation. To be, to exist, is to be in the hands of Satan for testing. But victory is promised to those who abide in God.

While we are not to fear the testings that are to come, we must not anticipate trials that may never come. "Some," not all, are to be cast into prison; some "may" thus be tried, others may not. We are to be prepared for the worst, but not to unnecessarily anticipate it, and thus be led into needless apprehension and fear. Not all the Christians in Smyrna were to be called upon to suffer such extreme persecution. All would doubtless feel the pang of ostracism if they refused to bow in worship before the statue of the emperor—as every true Christian, of course, would. And sometimes one thinks that it is harder to *live* for Christ than it is to die for Him.

"So he died for his faith; that is fine;
That is more than the most of us do;
But stay—can you add to that line
That he lived for it, too?

"It is easy to die. Men have died
For a wish or a whim,
From bravado or passion or pride—
Was it hard for him?

"But to live: every day to live out
All the truth that he dreamt,
While his friends met his conduct with doubt,
And the world with contempt.

"Was it thus that he plodded ahead,
Never turning aside?
Then we'll talk of the life that he lived,
Even more than the death that he died."

Yet some were to be called upon to die for His name's sake in Smyrna. Polycarp was one of the Smyrna martyrs. The story of his martyrdom is interesting. He is said to have been pastor of the church there. "Arrested at the home of a friend outside the city, this venerable man was met by the Irenarch Herod and taken up into his splendid chariot. Herod asked: 'What harm is there in saying "Cæsar is Lord," and in sacrificing with the other ceremonies observed on such occasions, and so make sure of your safety?' To which Polycarp answered: 'I cannot do as you advise me. I cannot say "Cæsar is Lord;" I can only say "Jesus is Lord."' The pagan populace demanded that he be given to the lions, then that he be burned. While in the arena the proconsul said to him, 'Swear by the fortune of Cæsar. Repent, and say "Away with the atheists." Swear, and I will set thee at liberty: reproach Christ.' Through the centuries has echoed the noble reply of the aged martyr: 'Eighty and six years have I served Him and He never did me any injury: how can I blaspheme my King and my Saviour?' They burned Polycarp's body but were unable to conquer his spirit. Loyalty like this, though not often tested to the point of death, has ever existed in the Church; through it Christ conquers" (Ogden). We saw evidences of similar heroism in the Boxer uprising, when Chinese Christians by the hundreds gave up their lives rather than deny Christ.

How such heroism and self-sacrifice shame us today. Why, we are even ashamed to stand up on our feet and

testify for Christ in a meeting of Christians. Of course it is wrong to parade religion. But let us not forget that it is criminal to hide it, too. It is true that silence is golden, but there is a time when it is rightdown cowardice, treachery and treason. And many of us would have a little more persecution and suffering for Christ's sake were it not that we are craven cowards, and blush to speak His name or own His cause. And think you that such slinking cowards will enter heaven? Never. We are told (Rev. 21:8) that "the fearful," that is, the cowardly, those who are the opposite to the "overcomers" in the preceding verse—shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone. The "effeminate"—that is, those that are soft, flabby, and that yield to the touch, those without firmness and backbone—shall not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:10, 11). Why should they? A craven coward is despised by every true, manly man; why should such expect any place among men who have "overcome" through battle and struggle? Such cowards are contemptible in the sight of man and God. Let us speak up and out for Christ no matter what it may cost us. There are many people in this world to speak *against* Christ. Surely those of us who profess His name should not be afraid to speak *up and for* Him. Because some men degrade religious intercourse into fanaticism and hypocrisy is no reason why the people of God should not elevate it into a means of grace. Let us be courageous for Christ.

Is not *suffering* a necessary part of Christian experience? Can a man be a Christian and not *suffer* for it? Could Jesus enter into glory without suffering? No. Nor can we.

"Hath He marks to lead me to Him, if He be my Guide?
In His hands and feet are wound-prints—and His side."

It has been said that many of the church fathers who sat at the council of Nicea were scarred, maimed, mutilated; they bore the marks of their devotion to Christ and the times of persecution through which they had passed. They spake with the authority of men who had stood the test and who had proved their loyalty to their Lord. Have we any "marks of the Lord Jesus" upon us?

According to the practice prevailing at that time, slaves and prisoners were branded with the name of their owners. Slaves attached to the temple were branded with the name of the deity there worshipped. I saw illustrations of this myself during my visit to the Hindu temples in India. Soldiers, too, ofttimes bore the names of their commanders on their bodies.

Was it not this that Paul had in mind when he said: "From henceforth let no man trouble me; for I bear branded on my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." O, what marks they were he bore for Jesus' sake! Listen as he recounts them: "In labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren. In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of the churches." And so Paul is the slave, the captive, the soldier, the minister of Jesus Christ. He bears in and on his body the mark and name of his Owner,

Lord, Commander. But more: Paul bore branded in his *soul* also the marks of the Lord Jesus or he never could have faced and endured what he did unless he had been inwardly conformed to Christ.

Perhaps we today are not called upon to bear in our *bodies* the marks of our Lord Jesus, but by our lives we are in duty bound to show that we bear branded in our souls those very marks. What are the *soul marks?* Love, humility, self-sacrifice, self-denial, spiritual strength, courage, tenderness. We are told that this is a day in which we all boast of our independence. Yet the fact remains that we have an owner and are branded with his name. We belong to Christ, to ambition, to business, to the world, to society, to mammon. I read some time ago of a man who was describing his rise and prosperity in the business world. He pictured the early days of apprenticeship and self-sacrifice and denial; how he saved every penny he could until he was able to buy out the business. "And now," he triumphantly exclaimed, "the business belongs to me." But in reality was that true? Did the business belong to him? From the place that business had in his life, the amount of his time it consumed, leaving him no time for recreation, religion or family life, one could not but come to the conclusion that rather than his owning the business, the business really owned him, that he belonged to the business. He bore all the marks of business ownership. You could tell it by the drift of his conversation, and by his general attitude towards life and its obligations. The business owned *him.* He bore upon him the marks of its ownership. So we all bear the marks of that which owns us much more than we think. Whose marks, reader, do you bear?

"Hath He diadem, as monarch, that His brow adorns?
Yea, a crown of very surety—but of thorns.

"Hath He marks to lead me to Him, if He be my Guide?
In His hands and feet are wound-prints—and His side."

"Thou shalt have tribulation ten days." Just what "ten days" indicate we may not be able, definitely, to say. Perhaps it is a term indicating *limited duration.* It may be that Jesus, by its use intended to intimate that the suffering predicted would be brief, and would have an end.

"Griefs of God's sending, all have an ending;
Sunshine will come when the tempest is passed."

"Weeping may endure for a night; but joy cometh in the morning." Only a little while, and then we'll sing the new song. Some day 'twill all be over.

"Then souls be brave, and watch until the morrow;
Awake, arise, your lamps of purpose trim.
One little hour for carrying life's burdens;
Eternal years to walk in light with Him."

Some commentators think that, counting a day for a year, the "ten days" have reference to the "ten years'" persecution under the reign of Dimitian, the Roman Emperor. Certain it is that history records ten such distinct outbursts of intense persecution.

"Become faithful unto death." It is through a succession of trials that we *become* faithful, even unto death—should that extreme penalty be required of us. As our trials increase in severity, so must our faith rise triumphantly. With each new trial there must be a new application of faith. We are not told that death will necessarily come as the result of our testimony for Christ—indeed comparatively few are ever called upon to die as martyrs; but should it come to that extreme point, we are to "become faithful, even unto death." Whether the persecu-

tion that befalls the Christ issues in life or death is to be of no moment. Loyalty to Christ is everything. "Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death," exclaims the Apostle Paul. Of this fact, however, we are assured—that whatever the issue, we shall be more than conquerors, and crowned victors.

The Promised Reward: "I will give the crown of life. . . . He shall not be hurt of the second death." One cannot help but see in this promise of a crown a reference to the crowns given to the priests who officiated at the mock ceremony of the death and resurrection of the god Dionysius. At the time of his death a crown was placed on the head of the officiating priest. It is as though Christ said to His suffering church: "Fear not; be fatihful unto death, and when you die I will be there to put a crown of life upon your head as it leaves your body and falls into the basket." The promised "crown" is the faithful Christian's "Iron Cross," his "Victoria Cross," his "Distinguished Service Medal," his "Croix de Guerre." It is not a "diadem," in the sense of a "kingly" crown; it is a "stephanos"—a crown of the martyr, who has won in the battle of life.

Various crowns are referred to in the Scriptures, such as the crown of glory, righteousness, life, rejoicing. The nature of each crown is determined by the subject discussed in the text in which it is mentioned. Here it is a crown "of life" because, perhaps, death is spoken of in connection with it. In 2 Timothy 4:8 it is the "crown of righteousness," for the idea of the righteous umpire is connected with the promise. Here it refers to eternal life as is seen from its connection with the remaining part of the promised reward:

"He shall not be hurt of the second death." There

can be no doubt as to what is meant by the "second death." There may be a question in the minds of some as to whether the language describing it is to be understood in a literal or figurative sense; but the Scripture is very explicit, and leaves us in no doubt whatever as to the intended meaning: "And death and hades were cast into the lake of fire. *This* is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire." "The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever; and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name" (Rev. 20:14, 15; 14:10, 11).

The first death is that of the body; the "second death" is that of the soul. There are two deaths, as there are two births, mentioned in the Bible: there is first, then, natural birth—that which is born after the flesh; then there is the spiritual birth—that which is born from above, born again or anew, of the Spirit. There is the first death—that of the body; then there is the second death—that of the soul which we have already defined. The man who has been born but once, dies twice: he dies the death of the body and that of the soul. The man who has been born twice—once of the flesh, and again, of the spirit—dies only once—the death of the body, the "second death hath no power over him." It becomes us, therefore, to make sure that we have been born again, born from above, born anew of the Holy Spirit.

The "second death" is the absolute exclusion from God and the enjoyment of His presence. It means never

to see heaven, never to participate in the blessedness and felicity of eternal life; never to share the glories of the saints' reward. It is to be forever "cast into the outer darkness, where there shall be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth."

Christ is here encouraging the faithful and suffering Christians in Smyrna. It is as though He says to them: "Fear not them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell." "The worst your persecutors can do to you is to kill your body. After that I have the keys of death and the grave. They are powerless after they have killed your body, but just at that point is where I step in and I will see to it that you shall not be hurt of 'the second death;' you shall have a crown of life. See, I live! They put me to death, did they not? Yet I live. Because I live, you shall live also."

Men live today as though the killing of the body were the supreme and most awful matter. Christ treats it, under certain circumstances and for certain causes, as an incident merely, something about which a man need not be concerned unnecessarily. It is the "second death" that men are called upon to fear. Of course, the Christian has been delivered from that fear: he has "passed out of death into life." He shall not be "hurt" by it. "He shall *in no wise* be hurt"—here is a negative of the very strongest form.

"He shall not, no in no wise, be hurt of the second death." Thank God for that.

VI

THE CHURCH AT PERGAMOS

THE TOLERANT CHURCH

"And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges; I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth. But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it."—REVELATION 2:12-17.

The Address: "And to the angel of the church in Pergamos, write." Pergamos means a castle, or a tower. Pergamos was the abode of royalty; the seat of the Roman government in the province of Asia during the time of John, the apostle. In Pergamos there was a royal library with some 200,000 volumes—and this before the art of printing was known by 1,500 years. Parchment was invented in Pergamos; indeed, it received its name from this city. Pergamos was an educational city, one of the greatest universities of that day being there. It was "the city of styles." As today we say: "It came from Paris," so in that day, they said, "It came from

Pergamos." For a garment to be "imported from Pergamos" was to guarantee that it was the latest in style and the height of fashion. For architectural beauty it perhaps excelled any one of the seven cities addressed. The remains that exist are still beautiful. In the first Christian century there arose in Pergamos a school of sculpture which is said to have outrivalled anything the world has known, either before or since. It was from this school of sculpture that that most wonderful marble carving the world has ever seen, "The Battle of the Giants," came.

Religiously, Pergamos was the headquarters of pagan and heathen worship, the home of heathen divinities. It was a city of many temples, chiefly that of Æsculapius, the god of medicine, called "the Saviour," and worshipped under the form of a serpent. It was actual "devil worship." To the shrine of this god royalty came also for healing from every land. There were special schools for the study of the secret springs of life, which of course, ended in licentiousness. In addition to the main temple, in a grove near by, were temples of Jupiter, Minerva, Apollus, Venus, Bacchus—with all their attending gross immoralities. It was held that Jupiter was born in Pergamos. So this city was the seat of the federation of pagan gods and heathen divinities. In addition to the worship of Bacchus, the wine god, Aphrodite or Venus was worshipped with special honours and the usual licentiousness. A special temple was dedicated to what we might term the worship of immorality, even as in India one may see temples thus set apart for a similar purpose.

Pergamos was also a city devoted to the worship of the Roman Emperor. There was an "Imperial cult" there. It was, indeed, the first city to establish such a cult. A

great city, a grand city, a magnificent city was Pergamos; it reminds one of Babylon, Cain's city. Yes, it was a great city—but "*Satan's throne was there.*"

It can be readily understood, in view of these things, just how precarious an existence, and what a most difficult task Christianity had to face in that pagan city, opposed as it was not only by paganism in general, but also by the "Imperial Cult" in its worship of the Roman empire and with all the power of that empire at their command. We can readily understand how the members of the church at Pergamos could be tempted to compromise with the old religions and outward observances of forms of worship which would permit them to participate in the business, political and social life of the city. It is for this reason that the epistle so vigorously denonces Nicolaitanism. How significant now the words of Christ: "*I know where thou dwellest!*"

The Speaker: "These things saith he that hath the sharp two-edged sword." Pergamos being a royal city and the administrative capitol of the empire, possessed, naturally, "the power of the sword," and with that power went, of course, the "right to use it." The power of life and death was the prerogative of Pergamos. And had not the Christians already felt that right and power as it had been exerted by the Roman government in the putting to death of many of the followers of the Nazarene?

The reference to "Balaam" in this letter brings to our attention the fact that he met his death by the sword (Num. 31:8); and also the fact that the Word of God, which the Christians here are called upon to use in their conflict with the pagan influences in Pergamos, is called "the sword of the Spirit," reveals to us the fitness of the description of the Speaker. Then, again, it is the sword

that He threatens to use in case the church at Pergamos does not repent.

It is a "two-edged" and a "mouth" sword. In Rev. 19:15-21, Jesus uses a sword against the nations, but not "a word-sword" as here. The expression, "two-edged sword," is used some three times in the Scriptures: twice here, and once in Hebrews 4:12: "For the Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight; but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do."

This verse interprets the meaning of the "sword" which Christ possesses and threatens to use in this letter. "The Word of God" is "the sword" which the Spirit of God uses in the service of the Church. It is this Word of God that is the critic, judge and discerning power and agency in the life, faith and actions of men. Man is not the critic of the Bible; on the contrary—the Bible is the critic of man. It is not the Bible that is on trial today; it is man himself. There is no agency like the Word of God to reveal to man any hidden sin lying in his heart. It was a deeper knowledge of the Scriptures that the church in Pergamos needed, for that knowledge would have shown them the true attitude of the church towards the world, and in what the true faith of Jesus consists. Had they been using "the sword of the Spirit" as they should, it would not have been necessary for Christ Himself to threaten to use it against them. The Bible has incisive and penetrative powers; it can expose the self-delusions of the heart, and lay bare the emptiness of false philosophies. And this is just what this verse in Hebrews de-

clares that the Bible does. It is not setting forth the Bible as a treatise on psychology; but as a spiritual surgeon.

The Scriptures held such a place in the life of our Lord when He was here on the earth. He used the Bible as an arsenal of defense during His temptation in the wilderness. He met the temptations of Satan with a "Thus it is written." In the three recorded temptations He used "the sword of the Spirit" rather than any brilliant answers of His own. And He could have given them, too, mark that. In all the problems that were put up to him by friend or foe regarding His Person, Life, Work or the kingdom which He had come to establish, He referred the inquirers to the Word of God: "What saith the Scriptures?" "Have ye not read what the Scripture saith?" This was His constant appeal.

To Christ the answer of the Scriptures was final in matters of faith and practice. Can they be of any less authority, think you, to the Christian and the Church? The church at Pergamos, in all the trying vicissitudes of both doctrine and practice, has its attention drawn to the Word of God, the sword of the Spirit, which is able to solve and settle for them the problems confronting them in that city "where Satan's throne is," and where Rome exercises the power and right of the sword. False doctrine and immoral practice are serious menaces to the advance of the kingdom of Christ. They cannot be indulged in with impunity. The conscience, the heart and life, yea, and the intellect, too, need a daily bath in the laver of the Word of God. When this standard of truth and doctrine is ignored what can the Church expect in the way of soundness in faith or purity of life. Without chart, compass or anchor the ship will drift. And so will any nation, people, or church the moment it seeks to undermine the authority of the

sacred Scriptures as the norm of faith and conduct. This neglect and ignoring of the Word of God is the great danger sign ahead of us today in both church and national life.

The Commendation: "I know where thou dwellest, even where Satan's throne is: and thou holdest fast my name, and didst not deny my faith, even in the days of Antipas, my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwelleth." Christ knew, recognized, and appreciated the position in which this church found itself; where it "dwelt:" even "where Satan's throne is," and "where Satan dwelleth." Here, then, were the headquarters of opposition to the kingdom of Christ. Satan is the head of the kingdom of darkness even as Christ is of the kingdom of light.

Christ never made light of Satan. Men, foolishly and ignorantly, do so; but, then, what do they know unless they are informed by the knowledge of the Scriptures? To Jesus, Satan was as real a personality as Himself. Evil angels were as real to Jesus as good angels. Jesus called Satan "the strong man armed," "the prince of this world," actively engaged in destroying the work of God's kingdom by shutting up the human heart to the incoming of the Word of God; by sowing tares where the Son of God has sown good seed. It is only men of puny intellect, pride of knowledge, and unbelief in the Word of God who deny the reality and seriousness of Satan and his nefarious work. He is the arch-enemy of the Church. And the church in Pergamos was face to face with the enemy of souls in his own home. They were called upon, practically, "to beard the lion in his own den," and that is always a most difficult thing to do.

Then, too, a glance at the historical features of Perga-

mos, as indicated in the opening paragraphs of this chapter, will give one an idea of the forces of sin, worldliness and pagan corruption which this brave little church had to face. We do not wonder, therefore, that Christ lets them know that He appreciates the difficulty of their situation and the obstacles which are to be overcome.

And what was true of the church at Pergamos, is equally true of us in our individual setting, environment and circumstances. Christ knows well how that it is much more difficult to be true to Him in some places than it is in others. He knows how hard it is to be loyal to him in a home, for example, where you are the only Christian and in which your religion is daily mocked and your Saviour held up to scorn. It seems to you that if you could only be permitted to dwell in a sympathetic atmosphere it would be so much easier and pleasanter to live Christ. Perhaps that is what David had in mind when he said: "O, that I had the wings of a dove; I would fly away and be at rest." But God is able to keep us in whatever setting or environment out lot may be cast, even though it be "where Satan's throne is," and "where Satan dwelleth."

This is a comforting word, too, for the pastor and Christian worker whose field is a difficult and exceptionally wicked one. Some surroundings are conducive to success and comfort in Christian work; others, difficult and seemingly impossible of results for the kingdom. Perhaps you are surrounded by gross licentiousness, intellectual paganism, religious fanaticism, "the oppositions of science falsely so called;" perhaps the government and powers that be are hostile to your work and labours and utterly out of sympathy with the Christ whom you are endeavouring to serve; indeed, it may be that your bitterest foes are of a religious sort—"those who say they

are" worshippers of God, but who are in reality "members of the synagogue of Satan."

Now Jesus says to this church, "I know" your setting and environment. And, after all, is not that just the very place where the Church of Christ should be—right at the citadel of the foe? When Jesus spoke of the founding of His Church, He said: "And the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." As He said these words He might well have had His eyes fixed on the Roman citadel standing out prominently on a hill in Cæsarea Philippi. No war is won by the defensive, but rather by the offensive. The turn of affairs for the allied victory in the world war showed that. The army must go up to the gates of the enemy, not the gates of the enemy brought to the army. We sing: "Hold the fort, for I am coming." I am of the opinion that we ought rather to sing, "*Storm* the fort." It is the aggressive, offensive warfare that gains victory.

So the church at Pergamos was waging the warfare right at Satan's headquarters. Twice Jesus mentions this fact: "where Satan's throne is" and "where Satan dwelleth." It is a compliment to any church that it is situated in just such an atmosphere as that. Too often the Church forgets that it is called to witness in just such an environment. Why should a church leave the down-town district and move far away from the maddening crowd, and go into the beautiful suburbs where "every prospect pleases," leaving those down-town districts, the very strongholds of Satan, to the Salvation Army and the Rescue Mission. Is that desertion of the cause to the enemy? May God pity this old world if the Church as a whole should ever adopt such a desertion policy. It is as though Christ said to this church, "I am glad you have not left the down-town district where sin is at its highest

and where the glare of the red and white light districts blind men and women and enthrall them in the meshes of sin. I am glad you are 'bearding the lion in his den,' that you are staying where Satan has his throne and dwelling.'" "I know where thou dwellest."

"*And thou holdest fast my name.*" A name stands for the person represented by that name; it stands for that person. So we are told that the disciples "believed in his name," by which is meant that they believed in all that Jesus said, claimed and did. They prayed "in his name," that is, because of His merit and work and not their own. They taught "his name;" the stamp of Jesus Christ, His person and work, was on all that they taught; Jesus was their theme. When it is said that Saul "destroyed all that called upon the Name," reference is made to those who believed in all the claims of Christ Jesus and had received Him as such. What is asserted here, then, is that the church at Pergamos had stood out boldly for Christ, and was not ashamed of His testimony even in a place where Satan had his throne and dwelling.

"*And hast not denied my faith.*" Perhaps their faith *in* Him is meant; or the faith by which *He* lived, believed and taught. It would surely include the "faith of the Gospel"—all that for which the Gospel stands (see John 1:12; Gal. 2:20; Heb. 12:2; Gal. 1:23). It is difficult to say whether faith *in,* or the faith *of* Christ is meant. Perhaps both, and also the Gospel as summing up the faith. It is quite possible that the primary, although not exclusive reference may be to that faith of Christ by which He lived and practiced and for which He suffered criticism, persecution, ostracism and death—just such forms of persecution the church at Pergamos would have to suffer in remaining true to the name and faith of Jesus

Christ. So He could appreciate the peculiar trials, suffering and isolation they were enduring for His sake. And He lets them know it.

"*Even in the days when Antipas, my witness (martyr), my faithful one was killed.*" So there had been faithfulness even unto death for Christ's sake. Antipas was said to have been the bishop of Pergamos and said to have been burned to death in a brazen bull filled with fire. Some question his being a real person at all. History scarce mentions him; but that might be true of "many of whom the world was not worthy" and "who had obtained a good report through faith." It has been said that the name has a symbolic significance: "anti pas," meaning "against all odds," that is, "all opposition" to the faith; faithful even unto death. In any case, we have here an illustration of one or many who stood out against the godless multitude as a confessor of Christ, even unto death.

It is not always an easy thing to stand firm for "the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints." A certain part of the Church today is realizing how hard it is to "hold fast," and "not deny" the "Name" or the "Faith." It is true that the setting in which the true Church finds herself is minus many of the pagan surroundings of the church at Pergamos, but there is an intellectual paganism which today would seek to ridicule, isolate, and even persecute those who hold fast to the evangelical truths of Christianity. The battle between conservative and liberal faith is stern, severe and cruel—all the more so because the battle is waged within the Church itself. Family quarrels are usually more severe than any others. So it is with regard to the present day theological battle. It is not always easy to stand for the faith of the Christ of Virgin Birth, sinless life, the mir-

acle Worker, vicarious atonement and resurrection from the dead in a day when scholarship is worshipped, when evolution is king, and when men are tempted to make more of gnosis (knowledge) than pistis (faith). The Church is face to face again with the heresy of Gnosticism.

Christ knows the difficulties that stand in the way of maintaining a true confession in the midst of such circumstances. But there is a remnant in the Church that is doing it. A remnant, mark you. And one fails to understand this letter unless he marks the contrast made in it between the church at Pergamos as a whole, and a "faithful remnant" within it. Note the words: "Thou hast there *some* that hold the doctrine of Balaam," etc. Not all held it; some did; but others were faithful to the real faith as it is in Jesus. And that is exactly the condition that confronts the Church of Christ today. It is a house divided against itself. Only a part of the church had yielded to the influences of Balaamism and Nicolaitanism; some had kept themselves from such contamination. So we find "thee" and "them." In Ephesus there was not this contrast. The whole church there seems to have been guilty of "lost love." And while here the call to repentance is addressed to the whole church at Pergamos, yet the faithful remnant within its borders is recognized. There must have been a sense in which even the faithful remnant was responsible for the existence of false teaching in the church.

And is not this exactly the condition which confronts the Church today? Is it not "a house divided against itself"? How then can it stand? It cannot—not in this divided condition. There is an element in the Church that remains true to the primitive faith and practice of the early Church. There is another element that calls for a more liberal and tolerant faith and practice—a religion

of the twentieth century. And so the battle rages. How will it end? God alone knows. We may rest assured of this, however, that two such factions cannot long live together in one house. One must get out or be put out. This has been the issue of such division and conflict before, and will be so again. There is no common meeting place for two such opposite and contradictory faiths.

The Complaint; Censure: "But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there some that hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also some that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans in like manner." To understand the complaint of Christ against this church we must needs come to see the meaning of Balaamism and Nicolaitanism. What do they mean? Let us see.

"The doctrine (or teaching) of Balaam." Just what is meant by that? If we understand that, I think we shall also be able to comprehend the meaning of Nicolaitanism, for in the judgment of the writer, they mean one and the same thing, save that the one represents the Old Testament and the other the New Testament way of expressing it.

Balaam was an Old Testament prophet. His history may be found in Numbers 22 to 25; 31:8, 15, 16; cf. also Jude 11: "ran greedily after the error of Balaam;" and 2 Pet. 2:15: "following the way of Balaam . . . who loved the wages of unrighteousness." With these passages the New Testament reference to the feast which Balaam arranged between Israel and the Moabites should be considered (1 Cor. 10:1-14).

At the time of Balaam, Israel had been having a vic-

torious march. They had now come near to the border line of Moab, and Moab's king, Balak, was fearful lest he and his people also should fall victims to Israel's power. "And Balak saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites; and Balak was sore afraid of the people, because they were many; and Moab was distressed because of the children of Israel. . . . And Balak sent messengers unto Balaam . . . saying, 'Behold there is a people come out from Egypt; behold, they cover the face of the earth, and they abide over against me. Come now, therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people; for they are too mighty for me . . . for I wot that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursedst is cursed. And the elders of Moab departed with the reward of divination in their hand; and they came unto Balaam and spake the words of Balak unto him." The story is a very interesting one and should be carefully read. We do not have space to quote it in full so will give just the outline of the story.

Balaam listened to the messengers from Balak. He told them to abide over night, and he would inquire of the Lord what He would have him do and say. In the morning Balaam advised the men that he could not go, for God had forbidden him, and had told him not to curse Israel. So the messengers left, came to Balak and told him of Balaam's decision. Balak resolved to try again. So he picked out men of greater prominence, princes indeed, and sent them to Balaam, and with the added message that he would promote Balaam to great honours if he would comply with the request.

While still confident of God's will in the matter, and conveying the same to the new messengers, instead of sending them away instantly with that refusal, he asked them also to stay over night, and he would let them know

if God, perchance, had changed His mind in any way. Here is the beginning of weakening compromise which eventually ended in Balaam's ruin. God, seeing Balaam was set on going in order to get the large money and high honours promised, permitted Balaam to follow the devices of his own heart and go. God sometimes allows us to have our own way. Balaam is given instructions, however, as to what he shall say. Then follows the story of Balaam's journey on his ass, and his arrival in the presence of the king, or rather the coming of Balak into his presence. At any rate they meet. Balaam agrees to accompany Balak to a hill which gives a commanding view of the tents of the children of Israel, but promises to say only what the Lord will permit him to say. After the erection of altars and offering of sacrifices, Balaam takes his place in a position giving a commanding view of the chosen people. But instead of cursing them, he blesses them. "How shall I curse whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy, whom God hath not defied? For from the tops of the rocks I see him; and from the hills I behold him: lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations." Balak took Balaam from one point to another and besought him to curse Israel. But without avail. So the king and the prophet parted in anger.

But Balaam "loved the wages of unrighteousness;" he was greedy, covetous. The proffered money, honour, and emolument looked good to him. And so he began to think of the loss of all these things, and wondered if there were not some other way than by direct cursing that he could accomplish Balak's desire and bring about the downfall of the chosen people. So he did some hard thinking. Finally, he hit on a plan.

He could not curse Israel; he will seduce them; he

will contaminate them by getting them to co-mingle with the Moabites and participating in one of their religious festivals. It is true that, at first, Israel will revolt at such a heathenish idea and will express the fear of being cast off by God for such participation. But then, Balaam resolves that in such case he will draw their attention to the fact that God would not permit them to be cursed because they were His chosen people. Had he not taken a long journey just for that purpose, and had not God refrained him? How could any one curse those whom God had blessed? It was true that the Moabites were heathen, and the children of Israel had been forbidden to have any fellowship with such. But Moab was not Philistia or Egypt, those bitter enemies of Israel. Indeed Moab was in some way related to Israel, and their religion was in a distant way somewhat like theirs. Of course there were pagan elements and immoralities in connection with their religion that found absolutely no place in the worship of Jehovah as practiced by Israel. But Israel need not indulge in such practices even though they attend the religious festival of Moab. Were they not God's elect and chosen race? Would God permit any real harm to come to a people whom He had chosen to carry the knowledge of Himself throughout the whole world? Assuredly not. And certainly no man can curse whom God hath blessed nor render impure what God hath made clean, can he? Why, certainly not.

Thus reasoned Balaam who "loved the wages of unrighteousness." So he called Balak and told him his plans. Balak ordered the invitation to be issued to Israel. Israel, of course, at first, rebelled and refused. But Balaam assured them that no harm could come, no real, final harm, could come to the elect of God. They could keep themselves from idolatry even while participating

with the Moabites in their idolatrous worship. The covenant of God with Israel is eternal and cannot be cancelled by any such participation as he suggested (Num. 25:1-3; 1 Cor. 10:1-15).

Israel listened, heeded, participated—and fell, thousands of them in one day. Balaam had won his bribe by seducing those he could not deliberately curse, but whose downfall he secured by persuading them that a child of God can have fellowship with the world and not suffer by it; that even sin cannot violate a covenant; that "once saved, always saved" permits mingling with the wicked; that fellowship with the ungodly need not contaminate the Christian; that the boundary line between spirituality and worldliness is, after all, an imaginary one, and that there need not be such; that a man can touch pitch and not be defiled; that it is possible for Christians to so separate themselves from the world that they no longer have any power to influence them for good; that, after all, what is right and what is wrong, what is permitted to a Christian and what is denied, is something that is difficult, if not impossible, to decide, and each man must be persuaded in his own mind; that what is clean to one man is unclean to another; that, after all, nothing is unclean or sinful except to him who thus esteems it to be so. All this being so, according to the teaching of Balaamism and Nicolaitanism, the child of God may freely mingle with the world without losing any spiritual power or status with God. This was the damnable teaching of Balaam, and was being taught in the church at Pergamos.

Paul taught the doctrine of liberty in Christ, but the enemies of Paul had deliberately misrepresented his teaching and declared that that liberty meant license, and that the apostle had by such liberty wiped out the line of

separation and demarcation between the Christian and the world. They had taken Paul's slogan, "All things are lawful" and used it as a liberty of license. They had wickedly omitted the other half of Paul's slogan, "But all things are not convenient," "edifying," and "do not build up."

You see, Pergamos represented a condition similar to that which Israel confronted in the wilderness. Pergamos, as we have already seen, was a centre of pagan religious worship and its attendant immorality and licentiousness. The whole of the social side of Pergamos was saturated with that fearful and gross immorality. It was impossible, therefore, for the Christians in Pergamos to mingle with society, to partake of its life and pleasure and not suffer spiritual contamination. But there were some teachers in Pergamos who took the same stand that Balaam and Nickolai took with regard to this matter—that there was no harm in it and that there need be no fear, for God's elect, His real children cannot finally be lost—and so forth. We often hear such dangerous reasoning today.

This attitude is "taught" in this letter; it is "practiced" in the one following. What is the "*teaching* of the Nicolaitanes" is, in the next letter, their "*deeds*." So, as we shall soon see, practice follows teaching. As we think, so we live. No one can say that doctrine does not affect practice. It does; and we see it here.

"*Thou hast there some. . . . So hast thou also some.*" It is evident, then, that the greater part of the church in Pergamos did not hold to the doctrine of Balaamism and Nicolaitanism. But this false teaching was making its way into the very heart of the church. It is rather surprising, is it not, to find, even in the early Church, the Church in her earliest days and even during the lifetime

of at least one of the apostles, the beginning of heresies that have cursed her during all these centuries of her existence. So heresy within the Church is not something new. The Church has always suffered from it—and always will. The "tares and the wheat" will both grow up together until the time of the harvest. The closest scrutiny and the utmost spirituality of pastor or church cannot maintain an absolutely pure church. Jesus Christ Himself had one traitor in the midst of the apostolic circle. What wonder, then, if we find many in the midst of the millions that now profess Christ's name.

The Command: "Repent!" "Repent, therefore; or else I come to thee quickly, and I will make war against thee with the sword of my mouth." The call to repentance is addressed to the pastor of the church and those who did not hold this false doctrine as well as to those who were guilty of the heresy. Does this imply that if the whole church is faithful in exercising its duty and discipline that then those members who have been led astray will be reclaimed, and that if the church fails in its duty, not only those led astray will be lost, but that the church itself will suffer loss because of such failure and loss? We think so. Is there not always a danger of our being taken up more with the security of the individual than with the purity and safety of the church? Perfection is not predicated of any single member of the body of Christ; it is predicated of the body as a whole. "If one member suffer, all the members suffer with it," is a truth we should not overlook. It is the true Church as a whole that is to be presented as a pure bride to Christ. It is inferred that if the church does its duty that those members who have been seduced by false teaching will be reclaimed, and the trap or stumblingblock in the church

will thus be removed. The Church today must not permit within her bodies those who will ruin her. The whole church is responsible before God for the defection of its individual members and for the maintenance of the general spiritual tone of the entire body as represented within its walls. This fact should bring the whole church to its knees beseeching God for pardon, if not for its own sins, then for the sins of the aggregate membership. One wonders if churches today realize that fact? Do we ever hear of such churches coming together for such purposes? But we should. Methinks we would then see a mighty revival of religion sweep over our land. We surely need it. Pray that it may come.

How, think you, could the whole church "repent"? By calling the whole congregation together and laying the matter before God and each other; by dealing with the erring members and pleading with them to lay aside their false teaching—dealing with them in a spirit of meekness and not spiritual pride. If the erring members refused to repent of their defection from the truth, then the church must exercise the power of discipline and excommunicate them from the fellowship of the church.

If the church refuses to exercise this function, then Christ Himself threatens to do so: He "*will fight against them with the sword of His mouth.*" Discipline and exclusion or restoration there will be. If the church is too cowardly to exercise its functions and do its clear duty, then Christ will perform it. There shall be no escape. Because false teachers escape the discipline of the church, let them not think that they have finally and successfully evaded their responsibility or punishment. It is a question of reclamation or destruction. And if men do not bring this about, Christ will.

This is a most serious thought for those who today are

teaching false doctrines that subvert souls and lead them from the truth to destruction. God will hold such teachers responsible. One trembles when he thinks of the many young people in school, college and university whose faith has been completely wrecked by the false teaching of professors. What will God do, think you, "in that day," with such professors? "He will miserably destroy them." It is a serious matter to kill the body, but it is as nothing compared with the murder of the soul and spiritual life. "My brethren, be not many teachers, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation"—if we fail in our duty and lead astray those whom we are expected to lead to God.

"I will *destroy.*" I will not argue or parley; I will destroy. What that destruction will be, a glance at Revelation 19: 19-21 will show. God pity false teachers in the last day! The punishment spoken of here is against "them:" false teachers, not against His Church; Christ never fights against His Church, but against those in it who are false in teaching and life.

"*The sword of His mouth.*" This, as we have already learned, refers to the Word of God. The Scriptures are now, and will be then, the standard of judgment of both doctrine and life. They are the *canon of Truth.* "The words that I speak," said Jesus, "the same shall judge him in the last day." "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." "What saith the Scripture?"

The Promised Reward: "To him that overcometh, to him will I give of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and upon the stone a new name written, which no one knoweth but he that receiveth it." It is

well for us to recall in this connection that the very essence of the pagan religion of Pergamos was its feeding upon the secret mysteries of life. Recall also that reference is made in this letter to "meat offered in sacrifice to idols," false gods. The promised reward, therefore, is in some way connected with these, and doubtless refers to some special, unique, extraordinary enjoyment of and participation with Christ. Christ Himself is the mysterious food of the Christian, the Bread of life, the life of the Christian "hid with Christ in God." Those who, in Pergamos, are willing to forego the pleasures that would come from participation in the idol feasts and the pagan social functions in the midst of the environment in which they were placed, shall have as their reward, something far better. Instead of sitting down at the "table of demons," they will sit down at "the table of the Lord" in the glory.

"Thou, O Christ, art all I want;
More than all in Thee I find."

"*A white stone.*" What is signified by this? Perhaps it is difficult if not impossible to say with absolute certainty. Indeed it may well be that more than one thing is signified by it. It is said that the worshippers of the god, Aschulapius, wore charms on which were inscribed the name of this god in cabalistic character, and that, therefore, reference is here made to that custom. Others take it that the reference is to a practice then extant of using a white stone as the right of admission to a feast. Still others think that there is here a hidden reference to the missing white stone or diamond in the breastplate of the high priest—that mysterious Urim and Thummim by means of which the will of God was made known, and that this is contrasted with the secret mysteries of the

pagan religious cults in Pergamos. And once more: there are those who feel certain that the reference is to the so-called "tessare hospitalis," the tally or token of hospitality used in that day. It is said to have received its name from its shape—having four sides. It was divided into two by the contracting parties, each writing his name on half of the "tessara." These pieces were then exchanged, the name or sign on the piece which each received being that which the other person had written, and which no one else knew, saving he that had received it. Such a piece was considered most valuable and was carefully guarded by its recipient, for it entitled him to hospitality, protection and eternal good will. Finally, there are those who look upon the "white stone" as a symbol and sign of acquittal and victory.

Why cannot the blessing and goodwill involved in all the above suggestions be true of the Christian's reward for loyalty to Christ. They surely can—and they are. Is there not a peculiar charm in the name "Jesus"? Surely there is—and a power, too.

"When I soar to realms of glory, and an entrance I await;
If I whisper, 'Jesus' only, wide will ope' the pearly gate."

It is those whose names are written in "the Lamb's book of life" that are admitted to the marriage supper of the Lamb. That the Christian may know the will of God now, even though imperfectly, and will know it fully and completely in that world to come, is most certainly true.

"Some day He'll make it plain to me;
Some day His face at last I'll see;
Some day from sin I shall be free;
Yes, some day, I shall know it all."

Heaven will reveal the deep mysteries of life to the child

of God. And does not the Christian have his token and tally of assured keeping until the end when he shall sit down with Him in the Father's kingdom? He surely has. So all these meanings may be gathered up into one grand and splendid truth representing the glorious reward of the faithful in Christ.

"*New name, which no one knew save he that received it.*" "New" is characteristic of heaven, its things, pleasures, prospects. "Behold, I make all things new," "the former (that is, the old) things have passed away." It is the "new Jerusalem." So "new" is the character, even as "white" is the livery of heaven. So we find reference again and again to "my new name" (cf. Isa. 62:2; 65:15; Rev. 3:12; 14:1; 19:12; 22:14). Even down here names are sometimes changed when with them there has come a change in character. "Thy name shall be no more Jacob, but Israel." "Thou art Simon; thou shalt be called Peter." Wouldst thou, O Christian, know *thy* new name? Then see to it that you "overcome." "We shall have a new name in that land."

"*Take the name of Jesus with you, child of sorrow and of woe;*
It will joy and comfort give you; take it everywhere you go.
Precious Name! Precious Name! O, how sweet!
Hope of earth and joy of heaven."

VII

THE CHURCH AT THYATIRA

THE HERETICAL TOLERANT CHURCH

"And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass; I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first. Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works. But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden. But that which ye have already, hold fast till I come. And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."—REVELATION 2: 18-29.

WE NOW enter the second of the two groups into which the letters to the seven churches are divided. In the first group we have seen the Church of Christ in conflict with the world, but, as yet, generally speaking, victorious. It is true there were "some" within the Church who taught a false doctrine that encouraged a worldly life, but such, we believe, were in the minority; the great body of the Church had remained loyal. It is granted that the whole Church is called upon to "repent," and that the whole

includes even those who had not gone astray, but that call, so far as the loyal element in the Church was concerned, was a call to exercise discipline in excommunicating the faithless minority if, after being dealt with, they refused to forsake evil doctrine and practice. We may say that the Church as a whole, while tainted with worldliness, had not gone clean over into the world.

With the four churches in the second group, however, the matter is quite different. The minority of the first group have become the majority in the second; the "some" have come to be the "many," and the "many" of group one, the "few" of group two. In group one the world had to some degree crept into the Church; in group two it would seem as if the whole Church, with the exception of a faithful "few," had gone over, bag and baggage, into the world.

We are now in a completely different atmosphere. In group one we saw worldliness in the church together with the false doctrine that encouraged it, but it seems clear that the Church fought it; here, in the second group these are "tolerated," "suffered," permitted, apparently without protest. The Church knew these things to be wrong, but allowed them. Perhaps the church in Philadelphia is an exception to this wholesale charge, but she is at least affected by its spirit, as we shall see. It had sapped even her strength considerably.

The Address: "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira, write." Less is said about Thyatira religiously, politically or socially, perhaps, than any other of the seven churches or cities in which such churches were located. In Scripture, outside of this reference, it is mentioned only in Acts (16:14) in connection with the conversion of Lydia, a lady of some rank in those days.

The city still exists, and has a population of about 30,000 people, 3,000 of whom are Christians, nominally so called, which is to say that they are Christian rather than Mahommedan.

In the days of John, the apostle, when the letter we are considering was written, Thyatira was not one of the cities of importance. Its situation not only made it unsuitable for a military and garrison town, but, together with its climate, it did not produce a hardy people. Living was too easy; being situated in the midst of a very fertile valley it was unnecessary for the inhabitants to labour much in order to live. The town was situated on the boundary between Mysia and Lydia, and passed under the control of one and now another of these places intermittently, accordingly as Persia or Pergamos held the ascendancy.

Thyatira was particularly noted for its "Trade Guilds." No other city had so many of them. The facts of the existence of such "guilds" and their great number is a matter brought to the attention of the archæologists by reason of the inscriptions discovered pertaining to this region. So important were these "trade guilds" that they actually controlled the life, social, political and perhaps religious to a certain extent, in the city. To succeed in any measure at all worth while it was necessary that one belong to some one or other of these "guilds." And herein lay the difficulty which confronted the Christian Church in Thyatira. The artist, artizan, merchant, or industrial worker found it absolutely necessary to success that he belong to some one of the guilds.

But the great difficulty with these "guilds," as far as the Christian was concerned, was that they were in reality brotherhoods based on pagan religions and idolatrous rites and ceremonies with the immoralities connected with such heathenish worship. The bond that bound the

craftsmen together was a religious one; the very platform on which the "guilds" operated was built on pagan and idolatrous conceptions. The tie which bound the brotherhood together, then, was a religious one—and that, pagan. Indeed, the common meal, of which every member of the brotherhood partook, was a sacrificial and religious meal in honour of some one or other of the pagan deities.

It can readily be seen, therefore, that it was practically impossible to separate membership in one of the "guilds" from intimate association with pagan idolatry and worship. How could Christians then identify themselves with such "guilds"? Yet, as Sir William Ramsay says: "To hold oneself aloof from the clubs was to set oneself down as mean-spirited, grudging, ill-contented, hostile to existing society, devoid of generous impulse and kindly and neighbourly feeling, an enemy of mankind." Moreover, to refuse to associate with such guilds was to covet failure in business and social life.

Religiously, Thyatira had a well known prophetess (2:20), a local deity, who carried an iron mace (2:27). It was noted for its immorality—an immorality said to be inspired from above and connected with religion; it is referred to as "a knowledge of the deep things of God," in irony called by Jesus, "the deep things of Satan." Here Apollos was worshipped as the "Sun god," under the name of Tyrumnas. Coins of Thyatira, found somewhat recently, represent the god of the city with a battle-ax on his shoulder upheld by a blacksmith's bar, for Thyatira was famous for its bronze work (2:27). It was noted also for its merchandise in "purple," such purple garments being dyed with a "turkey red" known only in Thyatira. Lydia was a seller of such royal purple.

Unusual liberty was given to women in Thyatira, witness reference to Lydia and Jezebel.

"Christianity," says Sir William Ramsay, "would have disappeared had it not been brave and outspoken in its opposition to the pagan beliefs and customs." So the temptation of the Thyatira church was very subtle—to compromise with ungodly conditions in order to succeed socially and industrially, and to secure any political advantage whatsoever.

The Speaker: "These things saith the Son of God who hath his eyes like a flame of fire." "The Son of God." The reason for the use of this title, which is the only place, I think, it is found in this book, is because here we find a tendency in the church to degrade Jesus Christ to the level of an angel, and not regard Him as He is in deed and in truth—the very Son of God. It is evident that Gnosticism—or what later developed fully into what is called Gnosticism—had its roots in this church. The Gnostics taught that matter was evil—if indeed there was any reality in matter, and that a good God could not, therefore, have created a world of evil matter. The world was made, therefore, by created beings each one being inferior to the other, as the series progressed, until one evil enough made matter and the world. They maintained that Jesus was one, perhaps the first and holiest, of these intermediate creatures. This is the same error that Paul combats in a fuller way in the epistle to the Colossians.

As "the Son of God," Jesus Christ is presented to man as the creator and heir of all things (Matt. 11:27; Col. 1:13-16; Heb. 1:1, 2); the only way of access to the Father (John 14:6; Eph. 2:18); the Source and giver of life (John 5:24-26; 1 John 5:11, 12); the One who has brought to mankind the final and complete message of the Word of God (Heb. 1:2; Rev. 22:18, 19).

There are some today who would make Jesus Christ

less than "Son of God." They would hail Him as son of Joseph, great teacher, divine, but less than deity. Here is the subtilty and deception of Satan (2 Cor. 11:4, with verse 3). This will also be the work of Satan in the days to come (2 Thess. 2:8-10). The term "Son of God" indicates that Jesus is uniquely such, and that God is His "own" Father (John 5:17-19, R. V.) in the sense in which He is not the Father of any one else. He is "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Jesus is the "only-begotten Son of God," using this term not only in the sense of "beloved," but also of uniqueness.

The expression "the Son of God" has reference also to the warnings and promises of this letter which are quoted from the second Psalm. This power He has received from the Father (2:28). He is "Son of Man" in chapter one; He is "Son of God" here.

"He hath his eyes like a flame of fire." This expression indicates powers of penetration, the ability to pierce even into the reins of the heart and read what is going on there. The Son of God is able to search out hidden sin. Here are eyes of absolute purity penetrating deeply into the life of an impure church. "And the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and the heart; and I will give to each one of you according to your works" (v. 23). There can be no hiding of anything from Him. "All things are naked and opened to the eyes of him with whom we have to do." The one hundred and thirty-ninth Psalm is a wonderful illustration of the penetrating powers of God, and should be carefully read in this connection. "O God, thou hast searched me and known me. . . . Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising. . . . Thou understandest my thoughts afar off. . . . Thou art acquainted with all my ways. . . . There is not a word in my tongue, but, lo,

O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. . . . Such knowledge is too wonderful for me."

"*His feet are like unto burnished brass.*" Thyatira was noted for its wonderful bronze and brass works; the bronze guilds being the most influential in the world. Here are feet that are ready to tread down and stamp out all iniquity. Beautiful feet are they for those who have been purged from their sin and made like unto the Son of God, but dreadful feet to those who would seek to hide from Him their iniquity.

This letter seems so full of fearfulness. The soft and gentle words in it are very few. There is a sternness that you feel running all through the letter, which seems scarce anything more than an awful outpouring of divine wrath and threatenings of sore displeasure. It is all well for us to sing, "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild." But let us not forget that there is such a thing as "the wrath of the Lamb." He will take up a little child in His arms and bless it, but He will scorch to death and blight with the lightning of His eloquence the hypocrisy of the Scribe and Pharisee. What is tenderer, and at the same time more fierce than a mother's love? And it is because He, the Lamb of God, does so love, that the "wrath of the Lamb" is so terrible a thing.

The Commendation: "I know thy works, and thy love and faith and ministry and patience, and that thy last works are more than the first." Here we have a most wonderful eulogy. We have not only works, but growth in works; grace, and growth in grace. "Works"—descriptive in a general way of their activities; then those virtues and underlying motives to service, such as love, loyalty, patience. A grand encomium indeed coming from One who knew all things. Here we have service

and the multiplying power of it, its increase—"the last more than the first." Age had not dampened their ardour, nor had it diminished their efforts.

Then there were those underlying motives of all true service to both God and man, the mainspring of all real and true activity, the summing up of the law: "*love*" to both God and man. In the church at Ephesus we saw a church working without this underlying motive of love.

Then there is "*faith*" without which all our service is vain, for all true activity must spring from faith. Without faith works are dead, even as faith, without works, is dead. This church was not engaged in what we call today "social service," which too often is a service with no God, no Christ, no religion in it. That may be a social service, but it is not a gospel, and cannot save.

Then mention is made of their "*ministry,*" which refers especially and particularly to those little deeds of kindly service done among each other and those outside of the fold, those loving and helpful bits of thought and service which go to make up the sum total of what we call "works." O, how much we need these "ministries" today! There are many who do big things and yet who fail so miserably in the little things. They do big things in the church, but fail so awfully in exercising little kindnesses in the home. These are good "to spread a feast" but very poor "to give a cup of cold water." You understand, I am sure, what "ministry" means.

Then, "*patience*" is not overlooked. How often this word occurs in these letters. Jesus must value it highly. A "quiet spirit" must be of great price to Him. Patience is quiet amid storm; calm amid pressure. "Greater is he that controlleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city." Self-control is Christ-control. So these Christians were able to be patient because Christ lived within them.

And, lastly, reference is made to their growth: "the last works are more than the first." They did not grow weary in well doing, nor did their zeal for Christ's work lag. They were as fresh and active at the last as at the first. What *could* possibly be wrong with so wonderful a church as this? Let us see.

The Censure; Complaint: "But I have against thee, this —thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, who calleth herself a prophetess; and she teacheth and seduceth my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time that she should repent; and she willeth not to repent of her fornication." There is *part* of this complaint that finds place in the letter to the church at Pergamos, and which we have dealt with there, namely, the matter of "*committing fornication and eating things sacrificed to idols.*" It is not necessary to repeat it.

A new element, however, is introduced here in connection with the same matter, namely, the *suffering, tolerating* and *permitting,* evidently without protest, of such teaching, and, also, that what was the "teaching" of Balaam and Nicolaitanism in Pergamos has now become "deeds:" the church in Thyatira is actually *practicing* this false doctrine, and, apparently without censure, or conscientious scruple. That is a most awful condition. There is another added element in this letter. This false mode of life was said to have received sanction by a religious inspiration from above, and called "the deep things." So we come to see that a liberal faith had prepared the way for a liberal life; that doctrine had become practice; that apostasy from the faith had been followed by apostasy in life.

And do we not see that very thing today? We are told that some of our hymn-books are being revised, as are

also prayer-books and creeds. References to the blood of Christ, to future retribution, to worldliness, etc.—well, they must be eliminated. Why not? We have trimmed our doctrine, why not accommodate our practice accordingly? And all this was going on with scarce any protest—indeed, if there were any it was so weak and insignificant as not to weigh much or be noticed; certainly it had not sufficient weight to do anything towards stemming the tide of corruption in doctrine and life.

In the church at Ephesus such toleration was absolutely and flatly denied; here it is "tolerated." Why not be a broad, liberal, tolerant church? That is the kind of church that finds popularity with the world. Surely, but when the Church becomes popular with the world you may depend upon it that it has lost the favour of God. There are people in the Church today who say: "Why stir up all this strife about modernism, etc.? Why may not men believe in a 'liberal faith' if they want to? Let us have peace." "Let us be tolerant!"—that is the watchword today. That was exactly the condition in the church at Thyatira.

"*That woman Jezebel.*" The margin of the Revised Version has it, "thy wife Jezebel." Because of this some have thought that reference is made to the pastor's wife. Of this, of course, one cannot be sure. Just who "Jezebel" was is difficult, perhaps impossible to say. It may be that it was some teacher in the church who was to it what Jezebel was to Ahab, yea, and to Israel. Jezebel, in the Old Testament, was a pagan, who married into Israel, and so influenced Ahab, the king, that he was led to introduce all the pagan elements of the heathen religion Jezebel brought with her. Thus did she bring about the demoralization of Israel. And Ahab permitted it, evidently without protest. So here the Christian church in

Thyatira was permitting, suffering, tolerating this woman of the nature, if not the name, of wicked Jezebel to teach and seduce, by false teaching, the children of God; "my servants," those who belong to me, to conduct themselves as if they belonged to the devil.

"Jezebel," if a real person, was what you would call in the language of today a liberal, tolerant, broad-minded modernist. She was evidently a woman of great charm, ability and personal attraction and had won many followers ("her children"). Her influence had reached, no doubt, even to the church at Pergamos. She claimed that her teaching was given by inspiration from above and was much deeper and higher than that of the apostles, indeed, she called it "the deep things of God" (whereas Christ calls them "the deep things of Satan"). Alas, what a contrast and what a deception!

"Jezebel" means "unchaste." Her doctrine resulted in the lowering of moral standards. She was the wickedest character in the Old Testament. This teaching in Thyatira made Christian liberty, license; and claimed that those who were initiated in her teaching of the "deep things," the higher knowledge, science, were lifted above the claims of the moral law. And so antinomianism reigned in the church at Thyatira. Her teaching was a mixture of Christianity and paganism. It is claimed by some that the essence of this teaching had its birth in what later developed into Gnosticism, which denied that there was any such thing as sin or evil, that things were sinful or evil only as we thought they were; that to the pure all things were pure. One cannot help but think of a modern cult that is built on much the same foundation.

"*That woman Jezebel.*" It should be noted that in the Bible "a woman" is very frequently used as a symbol, whether of religious, political, industrial or domestic life.

Usually she indicates a system, quite well organized and developed. In Lydia of Thyatira, we see woman, perhaps at her best. In Jezebel of Thyatira, we see woman at her worst. It is not beyond notice that many of the cults with which we are familiar have been started by women. We might mention Spiritualism, Christian Science, Theosophy, as illustrations.

It may be that "Jezebel," in this letter, stands for a doctrine rather than a person. She is not "a queen," but a "prophetess." She is compared to a "mother," for she has "her children." Her doctrine was seductive. It did away with any difference between Christianity and worldliness. It sought to seduce, as Balaam seduced Israel, by trying to show that sin can not break a covenant, that the child of God can play with fire and not be burned, and can flirt with the world and not be guilty of spiritual adultery. "Know ye not, ye adulterers and adulteresses, that the friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is an enemy of God." "No man can serve two masters." "Ye cannot serve God and mammon."

To assert that there is no such thing as sin in the world, and that no contamination can come to the Christian by contact and participation with pagan, heathen and worldly movements, is to listen to a voice from hell—these are "the deep things of Satan." These are the very words of Jesus Himself. And they are awfully solemn. Carelessness in doctrine leads to carelessness in life, to licentiousness and idolatry. In Ephesus they were careful about doctrine, but had lost love; here, in Thyatira, they profess to have love, but are careless about doctrine.

The sin for which our Lord rebuked the church at Thyatira was that of *tolerating* such abominable doctrine as this. Apparently the church as a whole (with the excep-

tion, as we shall see later, of a mere handful) offered no protest against this sinful tendency in their midst. It is not that Jezebel is necessarily encouraged, nor that she is hailed as it were with a blaze of trumpets; *she is let alone; she is not put out of the church.* Such an attitude towards false doctrine and false teachers is sinful and calls for repentance. It is a false charity; it is a false pacifism. In this instance silence is guilt and crime. An outspoken word is the duty of the hour—and that word is not spoken, and therein lies the sin and occasion of our Lord's severe rebuke.

The Threat; Command: "I gave her time to repent; and she willeth not to repent of her fornication. Behold, I do cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of her (or their) works. And I will kill her children with death (or pestilence); and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and the hearts: and I will give unto each one of you according to your works. But I say to you and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this teaching, which know not the deep things of Satan, as they say; I cast upon you none other burden. Howbeit that which ye have, hold fast till I come." This is indeed a terrible threat. There is none like it in all these seven letters. O, for such words to fall from the lips of Him who here calls Himself "The Son of God"! Surely a sad and awful condition confronts us. Then false doctrine must be a more awful thing than some people take it to be or say it is.

"*Behold.*" When this word is used, as it is here, our attention is at once arrested, and we are prepared to hear or see something awful and terrible. So in this instance we hear pronounced the doom of false teachers and the

extermination of "the children" of this "mother" of heterodoxy.

"*Space to repent.*" God always warns before He inflicts doom. Ample time had been given to Jezebel to repent, but she had deliberately refused to change either her mind or her conduct; nor would she step down from her place of prominence in the church. O, the patience and longsuffering of God with the stiffneckedness of sinners! "Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearing and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" "What if God . . . endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction?" The bed of her sin will now become the bed of her pain and suffering. How like the doom of the Jezebel of the Old Testament this sounds! Ofttimes God takes the instrument of our wrongdoing and makes it the instrument of our chastisement: "And thus shalt thou speak unto Ahab, saying, Thus saith the Lord, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine. . . . So the king died, and they buried the king in Samaria. And one washed the chariot in the pool of Samaria; and the dogs licked up his blood; and they washed his armour; according to the word of the Lord which he spake." The doom of Jezebel reminds us of that of "the harlot" (Rev. 17), even as that of Balaam does that of the "false prophet" (Rev. 13:19; 20:10).

"*So shall all the churches know.*" Here is a lesson for the modern Church. We have here an illustration of what God will do with all false teachers and "tolerant" churches who harbour in their midst, unrebuked, false teaching and teachers, and practices. Let not the Church of today deceive herself in this regard. God has put Himself on record.

"*As many as have not this teaching.*" Not all in that church were blinded to the dangers arising from such false teaching and practice. Some recognized it as coming from Satan and the pit. And no doubt they lifted up their voices against it, but, being so few in number, they were not heeded. This minority had been willing to suffer the social, commercial, industrial ostracism meted out to all who lived a life separated from the world, and who maintained "the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints." So they are encouraged by Christ to hold fast to that which they have until He comes. The true testimony must be maintained irrespective of the cost. And thank God there will always be a faithful remnant in the Church that will abide loyal to its testimony for Christ. Such will surely be rewarded. It was this remnant that saved the city—for Thyatira still remains, while other cities about it have fallen. This "remnant" was "the salt of the earth" for preservation. "And the Lord said unto Abraham: "No, I will not destroy the city for ten's sake."

"*No other burden.*" These words, spoken to the faithful remnant, may refer to the shame they would have to bear, or indeed were already bearing, by the very fact of belonging to such a church, or having to endure such fellowship—if fellowship it could be called.

"*Hold fast that which you have.*" "Your Bible, your Christ, your Gospel is sufficient. Let no man deprive you of your simple faith. Ye are complete in Me. Hold that firm and steadfast. Perhaps it will not be long 'till I come, until the time of my coming, whensoever I may come. You cannot tell just when it will be; it is uncertain; it is my will to leave a touch of uncertain indefiniteness as to the time of my coming. But I will come. Hold fast. And when I come I will bring my reward with me, so hold fast till I come."

The Promised Reward: "And he that overcometh, and he that keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give authority over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to shivers; as I also have received of my Father; and I will give him the morning star." This promise is evidently taken from the second Psalm, the only place in the Old Testament where Jesus is called "the Son of God." It is a promise of victory and reign and the suppression of all enemies, including, of course, enemies of the truth, such as were then ruling in Thyatira. Christ deals in mercy and tenderness now, but there will come a day when severe judgment will be meted out to those who have deliberately refused to repent. "He will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax *until*"—ah, there is a solemn truth, not that He will never do it, but that He will not do it "*until* he comes forth to judgment," *then* He will crush all enemies.

"*And I will give him the morning star.*" In that day, when He comes, then the mists connected with the deep things of God will have rolled away, and things hard to understand now will then be made plain.

VIII

THE CHURCH AT SARDIS

THE POSING CHURCH

"And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."—REVELATION 3 : 1-6.

The Address: "And to the angel of the church in Sardis, write." On coins discovered in the region of Sardis we read the following inscription: "Sardis, the first metropolis of Asia, of Lydia, and of the Greeks." We may affirm, then, that Sardis was the principal city of Western Asia. It was the city of King Crœsus, and was extremely wealthy. It is said that when Cyrus captured this city, about 600 B. C., he found wealth equal to $600,000,000. It was situated on the banks of a river of golden sands. Here Crœsus reigned in wealth, splendour and glory.

Herodotus tells us that the city rose some fifteen hundred feet above the plains, and was a city of strong fortifications, indeed could have been made impregnable had

the people had energy enough to make it so, for its walls, being perpendicular, made them absolutely unscalable, and at the same time made it possible for a mere handful of men to protect the entire city and resist an army. This was true on all sides except the South. The carelessness and indifference of the inhabitants of Sardis was seen by their neglect of the north side of the Acropolis or Citadel, which was called "the crown" of the city. Disintegration set in, but they were too indifferent to repair it, nor did they consider it needful to keep a guard there, so secure did they feel in their impregnability. But Cyrus discovered this disintegration and found crevices in the walls, thereby enabling his soldiers to scale the heights, and capture the city.

Sardis was noted for its immorality and licentiousness. As we speak today of the gay life of Paris or Shanghai, so they spoke, in those days, of the "gay life of Sardis." We are indebted to Herodotus again for an interesting description of Sardis in this connection. He tells us that in their early days they had been a hardy, conquering, warlike people, but that after Cyrus had captured the city, Crœsus advised him to require the inhabitants to relax their military vigilance and the discipline that had made them the hardy people they were, and urge them to lead such a life as would cause them to become effeminate. Cyrus, apparently, was pleased with the suggestion and promised to follow the advice. After men have become effeminate, it is an easy matter for them to become victims of voluptiousness; it is just a matter of a short time ere that end is accomplished. Crœsus' plan worked; the people of Sardis became effeminate, flabby and voluptuous. The sad thing is that the church in Sardis seems to have caught something of that spirit, too.

In the year A. D. 17, Sardis, and some ten or eleven

other cities with it, was, in one night, by an awful earthquake, left in total ruins. So serious was the damage that the Emperor Tiberius offered to remit all taxes to Sardis for five years, and himself offered a personal gift of some $400,000 to aid in the rebuilding of the city—so Tacitus tells us. The city was rebuilt, but did not at any time equal its former glory. It had a "name" and a "reputation" made from its former glory, and on this it lived during its life after the earthquake. The church there, too, was living on a past reputation: "thou hast a name to live, but thou art dead."

The first Christian church in Sardis was founded by an apostle, so we are told by the historian. "But, evidently, it soon left its faith, and lost its power and influence. The warning of this letter had evidently been in vain. There are today but a few scattered huts amid the ruins; they are the only dwellings in Sardis where once the proud Crœsus reigned in his proverbial wealth. It is now the lonely home of Turkish herdsmen who alone dwell there. As a seat of a Christian church it has lost its name. No Christian now resides on the spot." Alas, how sad! And is not this true of many a church today?

The Speaker: "These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars." One cannot fail but note the omission of "the seven golden lampstands." Why? May it not be that Christ found it difficult, yea impossible, to point to such a church as that at Sardis as a fit representative of Himself as the Light of the world? It is sad, indeed, when we have to look away from a church or a Christian in order that we may see Christ, especially when we recall that it is their business to reveal Him. "Ye are my witnesses." "John came to bear witness of that Light." "Ye also shall bear witness of me."

But there is no fault *in Him.* So our attention is fixed on *Him* in this letter, as the One who gives light and life to dark and dead churches and Christians. Without Christ no church has either light or life; with Him no church need lack either. He stands ready to pour out the fullness of the sevenfold Spirit so that no church need be dead or dark. The one outstanding difference between a dead and dark, and a live and light church is—the fullness of the Holy Spirit. And He who has the fullness of the Holy Spirit, even Christ, stands ready to bestow that blessing on all who desire it. In another place we are told that the seven Spirits are "before the throne." That means that they symbolize the place of power. Christ addresses Himself to the church in Sardis as the dispenser of the sevenfold Spirit of God because this was the one outstanding need of that church.

"*The seven stars.*" We have learned already from our study of these letters that the "stars" represent the pastors, those in charge of the congregation. And is it not strange that it is the pastor and not the congregation that is particularly mentioned here? That does not mean that the congregation were not in the same direful spiritual condition, for they were, as the letter itself shows us. But a church does not, usually, rise higher than its pulpit. As shepherd, so sheep; as pastor, so people; as pulpit, so pew. Unless a pastor himself is filled with the fullness of the Holy Spirit he cannot create the life in the membership that God requires. The apostles, after they had been with Jesus for three years and had received such a theological training as such companionship would give, were, nevertheless, commanded not to depart from Jerusalem until they had been endowed with the power of the Holy Spirit. Already, before this, Jesus had breathed on them the Holy Spirit, and they had received

Him. But there was a deeper experience of the Spirit's power that they must know ere they start out on their work of world evangelization. For this they waited ten days. And when the day of Pentecost had fully come they received the fulfillment of Christ's promise of the Spirit, and they went out and preached and won 3,000 men, besides women and children, to Christ in one day.

This blessing of the Spirit's fullness is what the pastor, yea and every Christian needs, and must have, if he is to have light and life for this dark, dead world. Of course, every Christian has the Holy Spirit indwelling. He is baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." No man can be a Christian and not have the Holy Spirit indwelling him. But to have the Holy Spirit indwelling and to have Him in all His fullness are two and different experiences. Egypt always has the River Nile, but Egypt does not always have the overflow of the Nile. It is the overflow of the Nile that means prosperity to Egypt. When the Nile does not overflow its banks there is famine and death. So is it with the pastor and the church. When there is not an experience of the fullness of the Holy Spirit in the life, then there is dearth of spiritual power. The Christian is commanded to "be filled with the Spirit." And, mark you, these words were spoken to Christians, those who already had the Spirit indwelling. But that was not enough. They needed the fullness of the Spirit overflowing their hearts and lives. And that blessing the Christian needs constantly, continually, and repeatedly. And, thank God, he can have it the moment he presents a surrendered heart to the Saviour. This blessing is received by faith. There need be no ecstatic experience in connection with it. We trust Christ's word for this as we do for His other blessings, and He does

not disappoint us. It is by the exercise of spiritual gifts and powers that the Church grows. It is not numbers but power the Church needs. A decline in matters of the Spirit means an ascendancy of the things of the flesh.

The Censure; Complaint: "I know . . . that thou hast a name that thou livest, and thou art dead." It will be noted that there are no words of commendation here. The words, "I know thy works," are omitted in the Revised Version. There seems to be nothing but unmixed criticism for this church. How different these words of fear and dread as compared with those of hope and comfort to the church at Smyrna! If their "works" are mentioned, they are "*dead* works"—works that were not "perfect before God." There were then, even as there are now, people in the church who were very active—live wires, we call them; directors of the activities of the church, social and religious; but they had no spiritual life or experience. Their work was done in the energy of the flesh. Organization there was, but no spirituality. Wheels, but no Spirit within the wheels as in Ezekiel's vision. A church or a Christian may be very active, and yet languishing spiritually.

Mere ceremonialism and activity, minus the Spirit, is an indication of a consumptive religion. Ofttimes church activity is but an attempt to provide a substitute for the lack of spiritual life. Have you ever entered a church and felt that there was a dead man in the pulpit, dead people in the choir, and the pews filled with corpses? Motion and activity there was, but, also, the impression of death. It is strange, but nevertheless true, that in the case of spiritual death you sometimes have more motions than where spiritual life exists, just as a drowning man goes through more motions than the man that is safe on

shore. As you listened to the preaching, you felt it was done for applause; it seemed to lack that loving solicitation for souls of men. The singing impressed you as formal and operatic. The worship was dead and lifeless. The theatre has actors and singers; so does a church if it is minus the Spirit of life.

Do not some churches remind you of museums? Or do they not make you think of the story of "The Ancient Mariner"—corpses rising up to man the ship; dead men at the oars; dead men steering; dead men spreading the sails? O, there is such a thing as unsanctified activity—"dead works." So the church in Sardis was just "posing." It was not what it appeared to be. It was a hypocrite. It used to be real. It is now trying to live on its past reputation without its former life and experience. This church was a sham. Is your church "posing"? Is it a sham, or is it the real thing?

And yet, two things are worthy of notice here: first, there was a faithful remnant—"a few names in Sardis"—remaining loyal; and, secondly, the church as a whole was not wholly dead—it was "about ready to die," but not yet quite dead. Jesus would sound the alarm at the outset in hopes that He might save the church from utter ruin. His patience is shown again here, as in other instances, in that He does not at once and altogether, cast out this church. He pleads with them. "*Their works were not perfect before God;*" that is, they were not fulfilling the purpose for which God had called them into fellowship with Himself; they were not representing Christ before the world as they should; consequently the church in Sardis had become a hindrance to Christ's cause, an argument for infidelity, an encumbrance to His kingdom.

Christian, are you posing? You know well that a Christian stands for something before the world; are

you that thing? Or are you living on reputation, on what people think you are? Perhaps you are not altogether "dead," but are you what you "pose" to be? You stand for the Bible, for prayer, for consecration, for self-denial. Are you these things? Really, now, are you, or are you just "posing"? Are you living in the form of things, minus the power? Once you really had life, and what you did was the result of that indwelling life. But has that past experience ceased, and are you living on the reputation of what you once were? Which is the real thing in your life today: character, what you are; or reputation, what people take you to be? The greatest argument for infidelity is a dead professing Christian. Are you that kind of an argument? Really, now, would you be in the pulpit, on the platform, in the choir, an officer in the church, occupying a front pew—if people really knew you, and how little you are the real thing? You have externals and you go through the motions, but are you real? Jesus said, "Ye shall not be as the hypocrites." Are you like them? Have you a name that you live, and yet you are dead? Here is room for heart-searching for us all, surely.

"*Defiled their garments.*" Sardis was a most worldly church. There were "a few" in it that "had not defiled their garments." The church as a whole, however, had gone clear over into the world. It is interesting to note the steps of the growth of worldliness, Nicolaitanism, and Balaamism in the churches so far. The seed of worldliness has been sown by Satan in the four churches preceding this one. It was hated in the church at Ephesus: "thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes," consequently did not make much if any headway there. In the next church, Smyrna, it is evident that Satan has made some progress, for he seems to have had following enough to establish a

" synagogue " or church there. When we come to Pergamos we find that " Satan's dwelling place is there and the doctrines of Nicolaitanism and Balaamism have become accepted tenets for intellectual assent. In the Thyatira church we find practically the whole church gone over to these " deep things of Satan." In Sardis we find the result of that kind of a development and state, namely, spiritual death and religious posing. Here is a sad story of progression in spiritual decay.

The church at Sardis was thoroughly " worldly." They had " defiled their garments " with the sin of the world. And it is quite easy to see how natural it would be for a church, surrounded as this church was with an environment of wealth, ease, and luxury to fall a victim to the world, seeing it had refused the " sevenfold Spirit of God."

Once the Sardis Christians had been washed from all their filthiness in the blood of Christ. They had been delivered from the rudiments of the world, its sinful ways and pleasures. They had found full satisfaction in Christ and His Gospel. But now things had changed. They had become again entangled with the world; they had " defiled their garments."

" For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the last state is become worse than the first. For it were better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after knowing it, to turn back from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb: The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire " (2 Pet. 2:20-22).

"Apostasy is worse than ignorance." Flowers that are sweetest are sourest when they fade. Better to have remained in the dark than to have had light and then turned away from it, for then that light will become lightning and "a consuming fire." Better to have remained a rebel, rather than, having become an obedient citizen, to return again to rebellion. Surely "the last state" of such "is worse than the first." To go back again into the world is serious, not merely because of the departure itself, but because it means that you have forsaken Christ in order to follow the world. You have broken with Christ in order to take on with the world. Before a man can ally himself with the world he must break with his Lord. Do you realize that, you that have become entangled with the world? That you have let go of heaven ere you made partnership with the things of earth?

You have become "entangled" with the world. That is a striking figure Peter uses in describing a relapse. It is taken from machinery. It is the picture of a man who has been standing too near a great machine and has been caught by it and hurled to his death. Ah, it is dangerous to come too near to worldliness. The teaching of Balaamism and Nicolaitanism was that nearness to the world could not possibly hurt one. In Sardis we see a church that had been caught in the machinery because it was too close to it. They had become "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God." It used to be the opposite. Now they have returned to their former manner of living as "a dog to his vomit" and "a sow to the mire." Much better had it been for them if they had remained in their former condition as dog and a sow, for "the last state is worse than the first."

One who has thus gone back into the life of worldliness "has not the same appreciation of grace, the same

craving for forgiveness, the same hunger for holiness, the same longing for home! How is he worse? In moral discrimination. His moral palate is not as sensitive as when he first surrendered his life to the King. His mouth is harder! He can swallow iniquity neatly. How is he worse? In the poverty of his emotional force. The fundamental energies of his life are sluggish or dead; the love-force, the hope-force, the faith-force, the ultimate momenta which constitute the wealth and dignity of man. How is he worse? Because he does not know he is worse: "Thou sayest, I am rich, and have gotten riches, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art the wretched one and miserable and poor and blind and naked" (Jowett).

It is worth while to notice that there is no reference to any opposition either within or without the church at Sardis. There is no censure for tolerating either false teaching or practice. Why should there be? The world could well endure this church because it was really in the world. The world was *in* the church, consequently no trouble came from it. A profession of Christianity that can be maintained in harmony with the principles of the world even in its most decent and respectable forms is not the Christianity of Christ, it is not the religion which our Lord approves. True Christianity is "disallowed of men." It is hated by the world.

It is a bad sign when the Church and the world get along well together, for it always indicates that there has been compromise—and that always on the part of the Church. It might have been said of the church at Sardis as was once said of a certain body of ministers: "You will find them well bred, and you may be certain that they will not bother you about your soul." The peace of and peace with the world can be gained by the Church at

only one price—silence, compromise. Evidently Sardis did not "torment" the world with her witness of Christ as the church at Smyrna had done.

The richest man in the world lived in Sardis; materialism was its aim; mammon was its god; pleasure was its shrine. And the church of Christ in Sardis instead of lifting the world up to its, Christian, environment, permitted the world to drag it down to its low ungodly level. Alas, what a tragedy! And is it not one that we see repeated today?

Here again we find Christ remembering "the few names," the faithful remnant. Thank God they are never overlooked by Him. "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another; and the Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord, even my precious treasure, in the day when I do act; and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him" (Mal. 3:16, 17).

The Revised Version puts in the word "But:" *"But thou hast a few names,"* etc. That is a good "but." You know there are good and bad "buts." Have you ever noticed that, sometimes, when you are speaking well of a certain person, the person with whom you are talking says, "O yes, that's all right, *but*"—and then he goes on to tell you something about the person you have spoken well about that has the tendency to make you think less of that person? The "but" of our text is a *good* "but." Christ praises goodness wherever He finds it, just as He censures evil: To Pergamos He said, "Thou hast" heretics; to Sardis, "Thou hast a few that have not defiled their garments." Christ is always fair, impartial and just.

The "few names" are not given. They may not have

been people of any great influence in either the church or the world. They were great in God's sight, however. This "few" are set in contrast with "the remainder." This slight must have been felt by those who were so careful about maintaining a name and reputation. The "few" were sanctified personalities; they would never be forgotten. The "remainder," were such as had a "name" only, and that "name" is in the neuter gender —it was a dead mass, that's all. It had no assurance of remembrance by God. The "few" had their names written in the Lamb's book of life as well as on the roll of the church at Sardis; the "remainder" had their names on the Sardis register—and that's all. When the roll is called up yonder the names of the "remainder" will not be there. It is as though Jesus took the church register of the Sardis church and began to read the names one by one. As He finished He said: "Well, I find a few names here that have not spotted their garments with the lust and sin of the world." Such names were written in the book of life. They had been able to live a white life in a corrupt world; they had been able to keep in vital contact with Christ in the midst of a dead church. They did not leave the church, nor did they deem it necessary to do so in order to maintain fellowship with their Lord.

It may be said that this "few" neither leavened nor saved the Sardis church; and that may be true; but they, at least, kept the true light burning, they bore their witness, even though that witness may seem to have fallen on deaf ears. They may have been called cranks, yet they stayed within the church. They stayed there—and kept white. And because they kept white down here, they are assured that they shall wear white up yonder.

The Command to Repent: "Remember therefore how

thou hast received and didst hear; and keep it and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I shall come as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee." "Be thou watchful, and stablish the things that remain, which were ready to die." "Be watchful." Sardis had a reputation for impregnability, but was captured twice at night time because of lack of watchfulness. The church in this city needed to learn a lesson from this neglect. The threatened speedy coming of Christ is held out as an incentive to strict watchfulness. "Actively become the thing you stand for"—that is what is meant by watchfulness. It really would make a world of difference in our lives if we actually and truly believed that Christ could come at any moment. Would not that thought control our actions?

"*I will come as a thief.*" The meaning of this expression is not that Christ will come as a bandit and with violence, but secretly, suddenly, quickly and by stealth. They should not know, not by any means—a strong negative—at what hour He would come. It may be difficult to decide as to whether the Second Coming of Christ is here intended, or His coming in swift judgment upon this particular church. But why may the expression not include both ideas? Of course He would have the Sardis church know that it would be sad indeed if He should come and catch them in their dead condition, unprepared for Him and His coming in spite of the warnings given.

The Second Coming of Christ, and His swift coming for judgment are, both of them, used much throughout these seven letters. Whether either thought brings joy or fear to the heart depends, doubtless, on the condition of the heart. And perhaps it may be said, with some degree of certainty at least, that the spiritual condition of a church may be gauged quite largely by its attitude

towards the doctrine of the speedy Coming of Christ. This is seen by a careful study of the use of this doctrine in connection with the condition of each of these seven churches. In Ephesus, where love was cooling, Christ's Coming is set forth in the sense of fear (2:5). In Smyrna, the suffering church, it is the time when crowns will be given (2:10). In Pergamos, in which there was much worldliness, it is used in sense of dread (2:16). In Thyatira, where there is terrific struggle with temptation, it is connected with coming blessing (2:25). In Sardis, the posing, dead church, it is dread again (3:3). In Philadelphia, where they are holding fast amid trial, His speedy coming brings hope (3:11). In Laodicea, the lukewarm, nauseating church, He is at the door already to judge (3:20). Thus we have different attitudes towards this doctrine determined by the spiritual condition in each case.

"*Remember how thou hast received and didst hear.*" They are to call to mind their early days of faith and practice and the spiritual standards that controlled their lives in those former days; the simple gospel they believed in and accepted; the consciousness of sin and need of atonement; their need of the Saviour and the Holy Spirit. They are bidden recall what is the "faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" from which they had so seriously departed in both belief and practice. It is as though Jesus was saying to them, "You have all this in your Bible; go back to it and read it; read it the way you used to read it, and believe it the way you used to believe it when you were alive for Christ and on fire with the Holy Ghost. The modern knowledge you are imbibing is robbing you of spiritual life and power; get back to the old paths and the old faith. You have a little of that faith left yet; build it up; build on it;

rear up the old building again. Do not throw away religious observances, ceremonies and exercises; put life into them; keep the respect you have for them, but make them live."

The Ephesian church was exhorted to recall the days of first love; the Sardis church, her early faith, preaching, belief. Sardis still had the old faith—at least some of it, but she had forgotten "how she had received it;" not with the head, but with the heart; not with the outer ear, but with the inner man; not for proof and argument, but for food; not for others, but for self. The church is exhorted to condescend to men of low estate, and not to be ashamed of its simple, primitive faith; to go back to the simple spiritual standards that once controlled their lives; to recall what the Bible has to say about dead formalism, hypocrisy, empty profession and the destiny of such who are controlled by such things; to remember that they used to believe in future punishment of the impenitent and that made them earnest soul-winners; that dead formalism will soon lead to rationalism and apostasy; that they need life—the life of the "sevenfold Spirit of God," and that that Spirit does not work separately from the Word, so they must get back to the old-fashioned doctrines of the Bible that brought life and power and that created a passion for souls, and hold it fast, and keep it, and not let it get out of their grasp. If the church refuses to do this, then even "*those things that remain*"—the little of the old faith that they have—will languish and "*die.*"

The Promised Reward: "He that overcometh shall be arrayed in white garments; and I will in no wise blot out his name out of the book of life; and I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels." Again

let us remind ourselves of the emphasis each of these seven letters puts on the thought of "overcoming." In each instance the promised reward is for the "overcomer," he, and no other. Additions there may be to the Church on earth but there will be no admission into heaven save to those who have "overcome," their names only being in the book of life. The one who overcomes is the one who remembers, repents, and serves in newness of spirit; who maintains his "first love;" who is willing to suffer for the gospel's sake; who remains loyal to the true doctrine of the Word of God and live a life of separation from worldliness; who is sincere, and aggressive and zealous for the Master—these are the qualities of the "overcomers" as they are set forth in these seven letters. They are worthy of a very close study. Meditate on them.

"*They shall walk with me in white.*" "They shall be thus arrayed, as I am, see, behold me!" What they sought to keep white on earth will be made perfectly pure in heaven. The whiteness of earth was an "earnest;" it guaranteed the fullness in heaven. The white garments are "the righteousness of the saints." Perhaps it will be with the saints as it was with Christ on the mount of transfiguration—the whiteness without will be the result of the whiteness within. These have not defiled their garments; they kept them clean after they had been washed white in the blood of the Lamb; now they will be white permanently and forever. Then we shall have resplendent vestures for glorified bodies which will be the outward manifestations of inward purity. Not all those who have put on white garments have kept them white. Would that it were true that the justified were always the sanctified, at least in practical experience.

"*I will in no wise blot out his name from the book of*

life." That means certainty of salvation and eternal citizenship in that heavenly country. "A register was kept in ancient cities of the citizens, so that it could be known at any time whether or not any certain person belonged there and had a right to claim the privileges and protection of that city. So there is a book of the citizens of heaven kept there, and those have a right to enter whose names are on the lists.

It is said that at Sardis a list of great soldiers and famous men was kept. These names remained there during their life time, providing their behaviour was good. In case it was bad, their names were blotted out. If these persons whose names were in the book at Sardis maintained an unsullied character during their life time, then their names remained there forever; they were never blotted out. The church at Sardis was anxious for a good "reputation;" it loved to have a "name." Here, then, is an opportunity to have their names immortalized in the Book of Life in heaven, to have a good name that would abide for ever.

Those who enlist as soldiers under Christ's banner and servants under His name, have their names entered in the book of life as on an army or census roll of a kingdom. Really, the question of the possibility of being once saved and then lost, or having one's name written in the book of life and then blotted out, is not in question in this verse. What we are told is not that some names shall or may be blotted out, but that certain names shall *in no wise be so.*

Does Sardis desire a name to live? Then here is the promise to "overcomers." Let Sardis overcome and she shall have a name that shall be imperishable. Let Sardis make much of "the Name that is above every name," and she shall have a "name" for ever.

Has it ever impressed you as strange that God has no "Book of Death"? At least there is no record in the Scripture anywhere of such a book. And also that the first mention of the "Book of Life" is connected with "blotting out"? Shall we say that God has no Book of Death? "Say unto them, As I live saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked. Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" "God is longsuffering, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." Is it not true that it is man by his own wilful neglect who commits spiritual suicide? God's will and desire for all men is that they should be saved (1 Tim. 2:4). Men themselves are the guilty cause why they are blotted out of the book of life, or perhaps better, why their names are not written in that book.

"And I will confess his name before the father and the angels." What an honour to be presented before even an earthly king! How anxious we would be that the news should be spread abroad that such an audience was granted to us! We would be always talking about it, would we not? We would be telling our friends, "O, I was introduced to the king, or the queen, or the emperor, or the pope." But think of what it will be to be introduced to God the Father, and in the presence of the angels? Won't that be worth while? Jesus said: "Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess before my Father which is in heaven." How proud we will be to have Jesus take us up to the Father and say: "Father, this child was loyal and true to us, our Name and cause while he was down on the earth. He was not ashamed to own us and to stand up for us. I would like to introduce him, Father." And then, I think I see the Father smile, and hear Him say: "Well done, thou good

and faithful servant. Blessed is he that overcometh. Enter into the joy of thy Lord." "And these shall go away into everlasting life." O, that will be a wonderful scene. And it will surely take place.

It was the custom in Sardis that when one of its noble citizens who had lived a noble life, died, his name was read out publicly before the citizens. For this honour the men of Sardis strove ardently. But, how much more glorious it will be to have our name read out before the angels.

"Lord, I care not for riches, neither silver nor gold;
I would make sure of heaven; I would enter the fold.
In the book of Thy kingdom, on its pages so fair;
Tell me, Jesus, my Saviour, Is my name written there?"

"Help me, dear Saviour, Thee to own
And ever faithful be;
And when Thou sittest on Thy throne;
Dear Lord, remember me."

IX

THE CHURCH AT PHILADELPHIA

THE EVANGELIZING CHURCH

"And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth; I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast not denied my name. Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee. Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."—REVELATION 3:7-13.

The Address: "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia, write." Philadelphia was about fifteen miles from Smyrna. It was set on a flat summit of a volcanic mountain range, and consequently the inhabitants were in constant fear of earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. "Philadelphia is a city subject to constant earthquakes. The majority of people pass their lives in the country . . . the walls of the houses are constantly opening . . . dwelling are insecure . . . the people are always living in dread of some impending catastrophe"—so writes the historian Streba. Gibbons says of the city, that while it

was set on a flat summit of a volcanic mountain range, "yet it alone of all the churches escaped the ravage of time and earthquake," and was saved by either "prophecy or courage." . . . "Among the Greek colonies and churches of Asia, Philadelphia is still erect, a column in the scene of ruins, a pleasing example that the paths of honour and safety may sometimes be the same."

Philadelphia occupied a strategic position with regard to the upland cities of the interior, we are told, and was the "open door" for trade on the main road from Smyrna to the cities of Phrygia. In this sense it was a "key" and an "open door." It, at least, held the key to the trade of that large and extensive region. It is, perhaps, because of this that the church in Philadelphia is reminded of its strategic and missionary opportunity. The fact that the city was so unsafe and likely to be rent asunder by earthquake at any time gave the church opportunity to direct the minds of the fleeing inhabitants to "the things that can never be shaken."

Because of the generosity of the emperor in helping to rebuild the city after one of its severest earthquakes, the inhabitants changed its name from Philadelphia to "New Cæsarea," in honour of the Cæsar then reigning. The character of the emperor, however, so deteriorated that the people of Philadelphia were sorry they had changed the name of their city. The emperor Tiberius lived so corrupt, cruel and licentious a life as to go down in history as one of the most wicked and brutal Cæsars that ever ruled over Rome. Reference is made in this letter to a spiritual "new name, "the name of my God," but one can rest assured that there will be no need of changing it once it is received.

Philadelphia was regarded as a propagation centre from which Greek culture might be spread throughout the

country. It was thus a great radiating centre, and we can see how the church there might be called the church of the "Open Door." It seems also, from the fact of the mentioned opposition arising from them, that the Jewish National Party must have been strong here, and that the church suffered greatly by its persecution. The city of Philadelphia, therefore, held the key to the cultural, religious and industrial life of that entire region. For all these it was a radiating centre.

Canon Tristam tells us that, a few years ago, of the 15,000 inhabitants of Philadelphia, some 5,000 are members of the Greek Church, and in that sense are called Christians (as distinguished from Mahommedans). There is still a bishop of Philadelphia, and several churches. The "Christians" are permitted to ring their church bells and to have religious processions, a privilege accorded to no other town in the interior of Asia Minor. Philadelphia is now called "Allah Shehv," the city of God. Is not this a significant fact when you recall the "promise" made to this church: "I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of *the city of my God*"?

The Speaker: "These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and none shall shut, and that shutteth, and none openeth." It is quite obvious to the careful reader that the description of Christ in each of these letters has a specific reference and adaptation to the condition of the church to which the letter is addressed, and in most, if not all, of the cases, to the rewards promised to the "overcomers." We shall do well therefore to study the condition of the Church in Philadelphia in the light of the description of the Speaker.

One of the great obstacles in the way of the progress

of the church in Philadelphia was "a synanogue of the Jews," called also "the synagogue of Satan." They were liars, false, untrue. In contrast to these, Christ is "holy," he is "true."

The church in Philadelphia was situated somewhat like Israel in a certain time of her national life, as described in Isaiah the twenty-second chapter and 2 Kings, the eighteenth chapter. Jerusalem, the city of David, was being attacked by the king of Assyria. In seeking to gain entrance to the city the Assyrian army had succeeded in tearing down parts of the wall. The inhabitants of Jerusalem at once tore down many houses and with this material sought to fill up the breaches made in the walls. Still the invading army were succeeding. It never seemed to have occurred to Israel that the Lord their God might be able to deliver them. This neglect God noted and called upon His people to repent, and to come before Him with weeping. But instead of heeding this call for mourning and repentance the people plunged into a season of eating, drinking and frivolity. In this seeming defiance of God, Shebna, the treasurer and keeper of the crown, seems to be the leader. His overthrow and death were foretold by God through the prophet, and the keys of power and authority which he held were to pass into the hand of Eliakim, together with the governmental powers, and he shall open, and he shall shut. Isaiah 9:6-8: "And the government shall be upon his shoulders," etc., is interesting to read in this connection. So the key of David passed from Shebna to Eliakim. The boastings of the king of Assyria against the king of Israel were many and loud (see 2 Kings 18), and for a while seemed to terrify the king and armies of Israel, but God exhorted them not to fear any of these things, for even though they were few as compared with the armies of Assyria,

He would fight for them, and would *open for them a door of deliverance which no man could shut.* And God kept His word, for the king of Assyria was driven back. So even though Israel was numerically smaller and weaker than Assyria, yet He would not be deaf to the prayers of Hezekiah, Isaiah and Eliakim. *He would shut up the breaches* which the king of Assyria had made in the walls of Jerusalem, and *when He shut them up no man could open them again.* Israel could not win by her own power, for she had *too little strength;* Assyria could not win by her great powers, for God had closed the gates through which its armies expected to enter to victory, *and what God had closed no man could open.*

The application of this Old Testament narrative to the case before us is clear. The church at Philadelphia was weak, it had but "little strength" with which to oppose "the synagogue of Satan" and the opposition of the Jews, yet Christ was there to be their strength and victory. He had "*the key of David,*" He "*openeth and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no man openeth.*" Christ is regent over the kingdom of God.

Of course the expressions, "holy" and "true" have a personal reference to Jesus Himself. He is these things in His very character. He is the opposite of false gods and false messiahs; He is very God, the true Messiah, the King. He perfectly answers to God and the scriptural idea of the Messiah (Heb. 1:3). The "keys" are in His hands. He still retains the highest administrative powers of the Father's kingdom and of the Church. If the Church errs in binding or loosing He cancels the judgment. The veto power is in His hands. The Church can never open what Christ shuts, nor shut what He opens. The Church sometimes errs in this matter, even

as do some bodies claiming to be a body of the people of God (as in the case of these Jews in Philadelphia who shut the door of fellowship in the face of the little church in Philadelphia).

Peter opened the door of the Church to the Gentiles, and then tried to shut it again (Acts 10:11; Gal. 2:11,18).

Whoever is in Christ is by that very fact in the Church by a right which none can deny or dispute (Gal. 6:1). Yet how many such are held out of the fellowship and communion of some body of God's people because they cannot see eye to eye with them on some little, inconsequential, non-essential thing? The "Jewish synagogue" in Philadelphia excluded this little congregation of the saints of God, maintaining that they of the synagogue were the only true people of God in that city. And so they ostracised and excommunicated the Christians in Philadelphia from their fellowship.

But those whom the Jews shut out, Christ took in; they may shut the door, but Christ opens it. Whoever is in Christ is holy, and so is the true Church, and in fellowship with Christ who is "the Holy One" of God. He Who is absolutely holy, and they who, because of their identification with Him are relatively holy, that is, holy by calling, are one in fellowship; they belong to the one body of which He is the Head; they are *in* and *of* the Church.

"The keys of the kingdom of heaven." Three kinds of "keys" are referred to in the Scriptures and which are of pertinent interest in this connection: the keys of the kingdom, the keys of death and Hades, and the key of David. Let us glance briefly at each of these for a moment.

By the expression, "the keys of the kingdom of

heaven," we understand a right conferred upon the apostles to state the terms of salvation and fellowship to all men for entrance into the kingdom of heaven, especially so, perhaps, to the Gentiles, who, up to this time, had not been considered as eligible for such blessings. Peter exercised such power of the keys when he admitted Cornelius into the Church. He was taken to task for doing so by some, but finally he was able to clearly show that he was in harmony with the teachings of our Lord in acting as he did (Acts 10:11).

There are some, the Roman Church for instance, who make too much of this "power of the keys." They reserve the right on the part of their own clergy to bind and loose the sins of men. This claim they base on the alleged fact that this particular power was given to Peter only, and that the Roman Church is the immediate successor of Peter. But that this power was not given to Peter alone, but to all the eleven apostles equally, and indeed to the whole Church of Christ, is clearly taught in the Scriptures:

"Then said Jesus unto them (the eleven disciples), Peace be unto you. . . . Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained." Here, clearly, the same privilege that was granted Peter is given to all the apostles.

Then again in Matthew 18:18-20, we have these words spoken to the whole Church: ". . . Tell it to the church . . . and if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven." Here we see clearly that the same power given to Peter is bestowed upon the Church.

So it is quite erroneous and certainly contrary to the teaching of the Scriptures for any one branch of the Church of Christ to claim the exclusive right to whatever is meant by "the power of the keys."

Then there are "*the keys of death and of Hades.*" By this expression we are to understand that Christ, by His own death and victory over death and the grave, and by His resurrection and descent into Hades, has achieved victory over these enemies of mankind, so that no more hath death dominion over Him or His children. He now holds in His pierced hands the keys of death and Hades—and for the child of God, they are golden keys. "O, death, where is thy sting! O, grave, where is try victory! Thanks be unto God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Finally, we have "*the key of David.*" By this expression we understand that Christ has the authority, absolute and final, in the Messianic kingdom and reign. It would seem also, judging from its mention in this letter, that it stands for the power of Christ to open doors of opportunity to and for His Church.

In keeping with his office as the Bearer of the Keys, Jesus had set before this little church in Philadelphia a great and open door of opportunity. He would have the Church become a missionary base for the spread of the gospel even as Philadelphia itself was a missionary base for the dissemination of Greek culture. The name He would have this little church take for itself is "The Church of the Open Door." Missions, extension, dissemination—that should be its policy and programme. It should be its duty to enter every open door and field and possess it for God.

It might seem to us that this church, persecuted as it was, might well have been on the lookout for "a door of

escape." But no; Christ's open door is not one of escape, as in the case of a prisoner who, seeing the prison door open, considers it an opportunity to secure his freedom; it is rather the open door of a free man seeking entrance for usefulness and larger opportunity. It is the door of entrance to a larger life and a more abundant service.

We can well imagine how restricted and bound the Apostle John felt as he sat languishing in his fortress prison-house on Patmos. It was not so much the thought of being *shut in* that made the Patmos experience irksome to John, but rather that he was *shut out* from opportunities of life and service for Christ. He looked out upon Rome, yea the world with its open doors calling for the Gospel, needing it if not calling for it, and he himself shut in and unable to enter those open doors. It is not the daily treading of the mill that is irksome and that frets the apostle; it is the thought that it is a "tread-mill" that accomplishes nothing and gets one nowhere.

"I have set before thee a door that is opened." Then the Church or the Christian need not pray to God that He will open doors of opportunity and service? Are there not doors already open? Is it not the business of the Church to find those doors and enter them? Too often do we hear of Christians who declare that they are waiting for God to open a door of service and a field of labour for them. Would it not be better for them to pray God to give them open eyes that they may see the doors already opened and awaiting entrance? Why should we ask God to do "miraculously" what He has already done "providentially"? There *is* an open door *somewhere;* find it, Christian, and go to work. The main point here is not so much the opening of a door, but the set of the soul towards the finding of that opened door.

"Do not stand, then, idly waiting, for some great, great work to do;
For fortune is a lazy goddess; she will never come to you.
Go and toil in any vineyard; do not fear to do and dare;
If you want a field of labour, you can find one anywhere."

Every Christian Church should be a "Church of the Open Door." It should have a great broad missionary program. A church that is not known outside of its own community, city or country, is a dead church. It has also forfeited its right to existence. Its candlestick should be removed. Missions are not a luxury of the Church; they are the very necessity of its life, growth and progress.

I have read of an artist who was requested to paint a picture of a dead church. He put on canvas a magnificent Gothic structure, its inside most elaborately and ornately furnished; all its appointments luxurious; its minister splendidly robed and its choir beautifully gowned. The people entering the church were portrayed as of the most élite. The audience seated in the pews were of the most fashionable sort. It was without doubt a most extraordinary church, congregation, minister and choir—well satisfied, well equipped. In the vestibule of the church, facing each person who entered, he had placed a collection box. Over the slot to receive the offering of the worshippers he put the words "Missionary Offering"—and then, he painted a spider's web, unbroken, covering the slot. That was the artist's idea of a dead church—a church that had no missionary, no open door policy. Is the church to which you belong an "Open Door" church? Are you an "Open Door" Christian? These are pertinent questions in the light of this letter, are they not? O, for the open eye, the eager heart to discern and enter God's open doors!

The Praise; Commendation: "I know thy works, that thou hast a little power, and didst keep my word, and didst not deny my name." There is, apparently, no criticism here. The membership of the church is small, probably: it has but "a little power," but it evidently is using what influence and power it has, and because of that Christ is opening a wider door of opportunity. "He that is faithful in that which is little, is faithful also in that which is much," and "to him that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance; and from him that hath not, shall be taken away even that which he hath." This is the law of Christ: that if we use what He gives us; He will increase it; but that if we do not, He will take away from us that which we have been entrusted with. The way to get a bigger church and field of labour is to fill the small one where you are now to overflowing.

It is really wonderful what God can do with little things if He is allowed to. "One shall chase a thousand; and two put ten thousand to flight." "If any two of you shall agree together." "Where two or three are gathered in my name." The Jews could not hold a synagogue meeting unless there were ten persons present (and they had to be all men; there could be a hundred women present, but they did not count). Jesus tells us that where "two or three are gathered together in my name," there we can have a meeting. Gideon's experience with his reduced army from 32,000 to 300 teaches us the same lesson. What God is after is not so much a large, as a clean church. The man that brought his sacrifice to the temple did not have to bring a bullock; he could bring a turtle-dove; the only qualification was that it should be "without blemish and without spot." God used Moses' stick, Gideon's pitcher, Shamgar's ox-goad, Samson's jawbone of an ass, David's sling and stone. "Ye see

your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world, to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world, to confound the mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to naught the things that are; that no flesh should glory in his presence."

It is said that when Mr. Moody was conducting his great evangelistic campaign in Great Britain, he was holding a meeting in the Crystal Palace. Before him were the many thousands of people. In the boxes round about the Palace were members of the royal family. Mr. Moody stood up to read the Scripture lesson. It was taken from Luke 4, and read, partly, as follows: "Many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias . . . but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta," etc. "Sarepta" was too difficult a word for Mr. Moody to pronounce (for he had not gone beyond the third grade in school). Mr. Sankey, who sat behind Mr. Moody, whispered the proper pronunciation. Then Mr. Moody tried again, and again, and after repeated failures, he closed the Bible, lifted up his face to God in prayer, and said, "O God, please help a man who cannot even pronounce the English language." And this was the man who swept England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, yea a greater part of the English-speaking world off its feet and turned its face to God. O, yes, God can use us even if we have but "a little strength"—if we will permit Him to do so, and then will take our hands off the glory when He has done so. Feebleness, little strength is no barrier in Christ's work. Ofttimes, too much strength is a barrier. "He giveth power to the *faint,* and to them *that*

have no might he increaseth strength." That is according to God's law of working. "Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmity, that the power of Christ may rest upon me; for when I am weak, then I am strong." O Christ of God, teach us again that in thy kingdom it is the "lame that take the prey," and that "we stoop to conquer."

"*Thou didst keep my word.*" How much has been made of "keeping His Word" in these letters! And that word "keep" is an interesting one. It has reference not only to obeying it, but to protecting, guarding and garrisoning it. Is not this a needed lesson in these days when so many seem to be doing their best to mutilate the Bible and to destroy men's faith in its authority and integrity? "If a man love me, he will keep my word." "He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings." "He that hath my word, and keepeth it, he it is that loveth me." That is one of the tests of true discipleship and love to Jesus—that we keep His Word. "O Timothy, guard the deposit committed unto thee!"

This "word" is also called "*the word of my patience.*" That is rather a strange word to use in connection with God and Christ, is it not? Had the word greatness or majesty or justice been used, it would have been easier to understand; but "patience"—well, that is not so easily understood. The word "patience" itself was not a well understood word in those days. To the Greek and Roman it was a word of weakness, even as "meekness" was a despicable word. Both these words: "patience" and "meekness" signified to them that spirit of servility and despicability, characteristic only of slaves. What a surprise then to find that God is the author of "patience" even as of might, power and justice.

And when one considers the life of Jesus carefully he

soon discovers what a large place "patience" had in it. "Waiting" was one of the most outstanding features of the ministry of Christ. O, the failure of the world to understand or receive Him, and how He waited, and pleaded, and loved, and died—waiting! Ah, love is a great waiting power. Perhaps the greatest things about love is not its flights, its ecstacies, its glories, but its "patience," its waiting power: "Love suffereth long; Love never faileth; Love is not provoked . . . beareth all things . . . endureth all things. . . . And now abideth . . . Love." Love can wait; it is patient.

And there were doubtless many calls on the patience of that little church in Philadelphia. There were times when it seemed as though they sowed and laboured in vain, and as though all their efforts were futile. No impression seemed to have been made upon the wickedness of the surrounding peoples. Yet they were not discouraged. They loved Christ, they loved souls—and they could wait, assured that they would reap if they fainted not.

"Didst not deny my name." "Thou didst not contradict, nor deny, nor disown my name. Thou wast not silent when a word was the duty of the moment. There were times doubtless when it meant ridicule, ostracism and persecution to confess my name, but thou didst never deny me, nor wast thou ever ashamed of me before men." What a testimony for Jesus to bear to that church. Can He bear the same testimony concerning us? And let us not forget that "name" stands for the Person and Work of Christ. And there is no doubt that it was difficult then, even as it is now, to stand up for the simple gospel of Jesus Christ, and for "the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints."

The Promised Reward: "Because thou hast kept the word

of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of trial, the hour which is to come upon the whole world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. I come quickly: hold fast that which thou hast, that no one take thy crown." Whether the words, "I come quickly" refer to Christ's Second Advent, or to some special visitation on Philadelphia, it is difficult, perhaps impossible, to say. The Second Coming of Christ is oft related to the visitation upon individuals and communities as well as His coming to the whole world in power and glory. Of course such comings are somewhat different in their nature than what we know as "the Second Coming of Christ." Therefore, I say, it need not refer specifically to the Second Advent, but to some particular visitation, as we have seen it to be the case in some of the other letters. This much, however, should be said here, that a search of history fails to reveal any such special visitation to either Philadelphia, or the church there. So those who maintain that there is a reference here to "the great tribulation" may be right.

Certainly God can preserve His people from, or even through, such an "hour" as is portrayed by "the great tribulation." Is He not the One who openeth and shutteth? Can He not provide an "open door" of escape, in this instance, if He so desires, seeing it would not be a door of escape in the sense of cowardice? It is true He did not promise any such open door of escape for the church at Smyrna which was facing the severest persecution, even martyrdom, although He did assure them that "they should not be hurt of the second death;" but why could He not, in the case of the church in Philadelphia, exercise the power of the keys, seeing He is represented in this letter as the one that "hath the key of David," and set before this church an open door of deliverance?

Could He not keep His Church from "going through the tribulation"—did He so desire? And are we quite sure that this letter does not express that desire? And, again, why could not this promise have had *a* fulfillment in the history of the Philadelphia church, and yet *the* complete fulfillment be reserved for that great day when He shall come in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory?

Of course, it should not be overlooked in this connection that that from which Christ promises to deliver this church is not specifically, as in the Olivet Discourse, "the great tribulation" (*megale thlipsis*). What Jesus refers to in this letter is some "hour of temptation" (*tes pierasmou*). Both these expressions *may* describe the same period of time, namely, "the great tribulation," but we ought in this connection to know what are the exact words of the text.

We know that "tribulation" is to be the lot of the Church and the Christian throughout the journey of life, "that through much tribulation we must enter the kingdom of God." That is all true enough. But that period of particular trial that connects itself in some way with our Lord's Second Coming, and which is called "the great tribulation," is an altogether different thing. We should keep the two things distinct. It is within the power of Christ to keep His Church in the midst of, and from and out of, both, if He desires to do so. He has "the key of David," He can shut and open, permit and deliver even as He wills.

"*Let no man take thy crown.*" We have already seen by our reference to the story of the siege of Jerusalem, that Shebna had his royal prerogatives taken from him and transferred to Eliakim, because he had not been faithful to God (Isa. 22:15, 20-22), and would not listen to

the voice of God calling him and the nation to a confession of its sin.

This will help us to understand the meaning of the phrase "let no man take thy crown." Let us not forfeit our crown to another because of unfaithfulness. Let us take a simple illustration: God lays it upon your heart to talk to some individual about his salvation, or some field of labour into which you ought to enter, perhaps the foreign field. You refuse to obey the voice of God in either or both instances. Some one else speaks to that man and saves him; some one else enters that field and reaps a rich harvest for Christ. You have lost, not only that opportunity, but also that reward; you have allowed some one to take your crown. Do you see it? The reference here, we feel sure, is to reward and not to eternal life, for the latter no man can take from us. Is not this the lesson that our Lord desired to teach in the parable of the nobleman (Luke 19)? From that servant which hid his lord's pound, was taken away that which he had, and was given to another—even to him that already had ten pounds.

"*I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God.*" This implies that the "overcomer" will have a permanent, steadfast and secure place in the temple of God. We have but to recall how, as we have already seen in the introductory part of this letter, that Philadelphia was frequently shaken by earthquakes, and the people lived in constant fear of having to flee into the outlying country, to appreciate the appropriateness of this promise of reward for faithfulness. The Christian is assured that never while the temple of God stands will he be moved. The Christians in Philadelphia "held fast" His Word, now He will hold them fast; they shall not be moved.

There are some who think the reference here is to the

custom of those days of raising pillars as memorials with names engraved on them: "Now Absalom in his lifetime had taken and reared up for himself a pillar, which is in the king's dale; for, he said, I have no son to keep my name in remembrance: and he called the pillar after his own name; and it is called unto this day, Absalom's place." I have seen that pillar during my two visits to Jerusalem, and have stood and watched the Jews, as they passed by, spit and fling stones at it. The ground at its base is piled with stones that passersby have hurled at the pillar. Surely Absalom accomplished his purpose of being "remembered," but, of course, in a sad way.

We should note, however, that the "new name" referred to here in connection with the saints' reward is written not on the pillar, but on the "overcomer" himself, for it is the overcoming believer himself that is the trophy of God's redeeming grace.

"*And he shall go out no more.*" So the overcomer is to be a pillar attached to the building from the inside—"he shall go out no more." To find companionship with a man because he is wealthy and possesses much of this world's goods, is one thing, but to find joy, fellowship and companionship in the man himself is an altogether different thing. He shall not need to flee from the holy city for safety, nor will he serve any more for nor be influenced by exterior motives or outer rewards.

What a wonderful thing it will be when all our service will be rendered with the sole motive of meeting the approval of the Master alone; when the criticism of the crowd, which, here, we so often fear, shall have no place in the character of our conduct; when monetary or material considerations are not for one moment thought of in connection with our ministry and service, and when each saint of God shall render, out of a heart full of

gratitude for redemptive grace, each bit of service permitted for the love of the Master and the service itself!

Three inscriptions are written on the "overcomer:" They are, "*The name of my God.*" When in India I saw Hindus by the thousands with the name of the god they had been sacrificing to painted on their foreheads. In heaven the "overcomer" will be a religious devotee, a saint of the most High God, branded with His name, belonging to Him, and to Him alone.

Then there is "*the name of the city of my God.*" The secular has now become the sacred; the devotee has now become something larger—a citizen. There is no longer any danger of losing one's religion by contact with the secular, the things of a city. So the "overcomer" finds himself not only in the temple of God—that is wonderful; but also in the city of God and with the spirit of the temple in him—and that is perhaps more wonderful.

We have also a third inscription written on the "overcomer:" it is "*my new name.*" A name known only there, in that heavenly country. We think we know God here as we study His wonderful names as they are revealed to us in the Bible. But there is still more of God to know than what those names reveal—precious as such knowledge is. Have you ever noticed that Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit should come "in my name"? And have you observed that when the Holy Spirit did come on the day of Pentecost it was in foreign languages; it is the Spirit that speaks to those who do not understand. So there is much, O so much, of God that we do not yet understand! "Now we know in part," and "we see through a mirror, dimly;" but in the blazing light of that new day we shall know and understand much more than we do here.

And may we repeat here a sentence from the opening

notes of this letter? And it is this: Philadelphia is today called "Allah Shehv"—"the city of God." This is very significant, is it not, in view of this promise made almost 2,000 years ago: "I will write on him the name of my God, even *the city of my God"?* So God will verify in heaven the fullness of the promise He has made on earth to those who "overcome."

X

THE CHURCH AT LAODICEA

THE LUKEWARM, UNEMOTIONAL CHURCH

"And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."—REVELATION 3 : 14-22.

The Address: "And unto the angel of the church in Laodicea, write." Laodicea was the capital of Greater Phrygia. It was one of the wealthiest and most prosperous cities in Asia Minor, being the principal banking centre of that entire region. It was noted, also, as a city of many and great industries, chief among them being that of the manufacture of soft, glossy wool of which rich expensive garments were made. The wealth of Laodicea came largely from this wool industry (cf. 3:18). "The country round about Laodicea breeds excellent sheep, remarkable for the softness of their wool, but also for their dark, raven gloss colour. The Laodi-

ceans derive a large income and revenue from them" (Strebo, historian).

There were many "hot springs" in the neighbourhood of Laodicea; they were "a prominent feature of the local topography." There were also, close by, "thermal springs," the waters of which were "neither cold nor hot," but "lukewarm" (cf. 3:15, 16); such being delightful for bathing and pleasant to the body, but utterly unfit to drink; nauseous, intolerable.

The finest ointments in the world, too, were made in Laodicea, as well as a famous eye-salve called "Corrylium" (cf. 3:18), sold all over the Roman and Greek world.

All these things combined to make Laodicea a city of great wealth: "Thou sayest, I am rich" (cf. 3:17). It is said that Cæsar cashed his bills of exchange there, and at one time a merchant prince gave to the city two thousand talents to be expended for public purposes. Indeed, so wealthy was Laodicea that when it was destroyed by an earthquake, in A. D. 62, it refused proffered help from both the State and the Emperor, declaring that they could go down into their own pockets and rebuild the city with ease. They boasted of their wealth. Other cities, like Smyrna, which had been visited by earthquake, gladly accepted financial assistance in rebuilding; but not Laodicea; she was too proud and too wealthy to accept aid from anyone. "Thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing." How true to historical fact are these divinely inspired letters! And yet in spite of all this evidence there are some who maintain that there never were such seven churches as are here depicted, that they represent but phases of thought. What can be said to convince *such* people?

Laodicea was noted for its famous school of medicine,

its world-famed oculists and its "Phrygian powder," the "Corrylium," or eye-salve known and used for affliction of the eyes throughout the world. And yet here were a people to whom Christ said that they were in need of eye treatment far beyond that which any of their famous oculists could give (cf. 3:18).

Being the metropolis of Greater Phrygia, Laodicea was a great and extensive city. Within it were to be found three theatres; an immense circus seating 30,000 people—the ruins of which are still to be seen, all of which indicated that they were lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God. Even after this letter was received by the church, and it was called upon to repent and turn towards the more serious and spiritual things in life, the great amphitheatre was built.

Laodicea was once named Diospolis, "the city of God" (after Jupiter), but when Antiochus Theos, the Syrian king, took it, he changed its name and called it after the name of his wife, Laodice.

From the Christian viewpoint there is much of interest, historically, in connection with the church at Laodicea. This church had come, indirectly at least, under the influence of the Apostle Paul. It had been the subject of his prayers and tears (Col. 2:1; 4:15). Archippus (Col. 4:17), the son of Philemon to whom Paul wrote the epistle of that name, is said to have been pastor in that church; indeed, it has been said that he was bishop of that district. Paul had written to Archippus some years before, urging him to diligence in his ministry. In some way or other Archippus must have suffered a decline in his spiritual life. This is a sad thing to record of him when one recalls the spiritual atmosphere in which he had been reared, for the Church met in his father's home. From the condition of this church it would seem as though

he had lost all spiritual influence over the church. He had been pastor of that one church for thirty years. Is that too long for a man to hold a pastorate and maintain his influence over the church? Some think so. This church, under its former pastor and founder, Epaphras, had been a great spiritual force. It is referred to some four times in the Epistle to the Colossians.

We have here, then, the picture of a once spiritually prosperous church which had become very rich, luxurious, respectable, dignified, with great standing and prestige before the world—and unspiritual, lukewarm, nauseating.

The name Laodicea indicates also "the rule of the people." So the church at Laodicea may have boasted of being "democratic." But is that a virtue? Is the church to rule itself, or is Christ its governing Head? "It seemeth good to the Holy Ghost and to us," were the words of the gathering of Christians in Antioch when they were called upon to consider their program for world missions. The Holy Ghost is the Overseer of the Church. It is a theocracy, not a democracy we need in the Church of Christ today. It would seem today as though Jesus and the Holy Ghost were not even called into consultation by the Church let alone acknowledged as the Dictators of its program.

When I was in China, in 1924, I was told that when a certain Christian body sent out its message to the Chinese Christian churches no reference was made to Christ. When this omission was called to its attention, the officials of this body maintained that it was not the business of that body to discuss doctrinal subjects. Think of it—a so-called Christian organization in so strategic a field as China, and going on record as omitting Christ from any part of its program of procedure!

The Speaker: "These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God." Here is a marvellous description of the pre-mundane glory of Christ. Surely this is nothing less than a claim to deity. The condition of the church at Laodicea is such that in dealing with the spiritual realities needed there the Son of God is described in such a wonderful way. These attributes are not those which characterized His humiliation; they belong to His exaltation. Just one of the attributes with which we behold Him in chapter one has seemed sufficient for the other churches, but here it seems to be different: we have three of them, and which, when considered carefully, would seem to be a summing up of all the attributes composing the vision of the Son of Man as He walks in the midst of His churches. In the letter to the church at Laodicea, He presents Himself in attributes of the most glorious manifestation and supreme authority. They are the attributes of a Victor who would deal sincerely and severely with a church which had ingloriously failed—and that without excuse, for with such a Head they need not have failed in even the slightest degree.

"The Amen." Jesus Christ is the absolutely True One. This is vital for this church to understand at the outset because of the severe arraignment that is to come. It is no fanciful picture He is to present of their deplorable spiritual, or rather unspiritual condition. His estimate of this church as well as the judgment He will pronounce upon it is an absolutely true, fair and just one. What He describes is actually true. He is absolutely certain of what He affirms. Christ is not merely One who speaks and teaches truth; He *is* Truth (John 14:6). He is the Truth beyond which there is no appeal. His opinions and decisions have in them the mark of finality. What He

says will surely come to pass, whether it be concerning joy or sorrow, reward or punishment.

In Isaiah 65:16 we have the expression "Swear by the God of Amen." The context of this passage declares that the judgments of God are to fall upon Israel because of her unfaithfulness to God; that He will cast her aside and take another people for Himself. And because He is the faithful and true God every word of this threat will come to pass. Israel need not be deceived concerning this matter. And so Christ, even as God the Father, accomplishes and brings to pass His own will and Word. Indeed, Christ is set forth in the New Testament as the "Yea and Amen" of every promise of God (2 Cor. 1:20).

"*The faithful and true witness.*" He is *the* Witness; we are "his witnesses." "John was not the light; he was sent to bear witness of the Light." Christ is *the* Light; we shine "as lights in the world." He witnesses through us. These words are used in connection with this church, however, to indicate that there is no motive, intention, purpose, or even possibility to misrepresent the condition in which He finds the church at Laodicea. With us, alas, too often, our opinions are coloured by our prejudices, so that it is difficult for us to give an unbiased opinion. But not so with Christ. He is "the faithful and true witness." The church at Laodicea had failed utterly to represent Him before the world—it had shown itself to be a false witness. He is not like that. He could say, and with truth, "he that hath seen me hath seen the Father." Jesus never underestimates or overestimates; He never exaggerates; He neither undervalues nor overvalues. He *is Truth,* and as such He expresses Himself.

And this is not difficult to understand when we remember Jesus' claim: that the words which He spoke were not His own, but the Father's. "He that rejecteth me and

receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him; the word that I have spoken the same shall judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken of (out of) myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment what I should say, and what I should speak. . . . Whatsoever I speak, therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak" (John 12:48-50). This is exceedingly important to remember in these days when some people speak so lightly concerning the infallibility of the teaching of Jesus. He is "the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness." His words are final; beyond them there is no appeal. By His words we shall be judged in the last day. Let us remember this. It is true that there were some things of which He was voluntarily ignorant, such as the time of the coming (Mark 13:32); but what He was thus voluntarily willing to be ignorant of He did not give utterance to. What He did give utterance to, then, was "absolute truth."

Because Jesus is the "Amen, the faithful and true witness," we, therefore, can rest with utmost confidence on His promises when we pray, and look with blessed assurance to the fulfillment of all those sayings which have to do with keeping power and the reward of the faithful in heaven. Then, too, and let us not forget it, every word He said that has in it threat, judgment, the announcement of penalty and punishment is true. Let us not cloud the issue here. His threatenings, even as His consolings, are absolute Truth.

Three things are involved in the idea of "witnessing:" An eye-witness; the relating of what we have seen to others; and a willingness, truthfully and at any cost, to bear such witness. In this threefold sense Christ is "the Faithful Witness." In this threefold sense, the church at Laodicea had failed. Laodicea had put Christ in a

false light before the world; she had been untrue to her calling. A church, even as a Christian, stands for something before the world, and should *be* and *act like* that thing. This Laodicea had failed ingloriously to do. The church at Laodicea was the daughter of the church at Colossæ, and it needed to learn the truth in the Colossian letter, namely, that the Church is the "body of Christ," and as such is to be the expression of Himself before the world; it should be the bodily representation of Christ in the world. It should be that—or change its name.

"*The beginning of the creation of God.*" Christ is the origin, the cause, the primal ground, that from which every created thing and being sprang (cf. John 1:1-3; Col. 1:18). This means not only that Christ was *before* every created thing, but that He was the origin, source and creator of all such, for this phrase has both an active and a passive meaning: referring not only to the thing created, but also to the one creating. This was a blow, of course, to the Gnostic element in the church which had come from Colossæ and Thyatira—"the teaching of Jezebel." In these words of address to the Laodicean church we have some of the strongest statements for the absolute deity of Christ.

How adaptable is the teaching of Jesus! He says here, in speaking to those who magnified knowledge (gnostics), "I am the beginning of the creation of God;" I made you, therefore "I know" all about you. How differently Jesus dealt with Simon the Pharisee and the poor woman who came to his house; with John in prison, and the Pharisees!

These words of address are pertinent to this church, also, because it was exhorted not to trust in created things such as wealth, position, gold, but in Him who created all things. This church boasted of her ownership of such things: "Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods

and have need of nothing." She needed to be reminded that she owned nothing. Men cannot create wealth; they may amass it. One wonders if any one in the church at Laodicea blushed when these words of Christ were read? Blushed at the insignificance of their boasted but empty professions of ownership and possession?

The Censure; Complaint: "I know thy works; that thou are neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So because thou art lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold . . . and because thou sayest, I am rich, and have gotten riches, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art the wretched one and miserable and poor and blind and naked." Here we find not one word of praise or commendation; nothing but blame and censure. Christ is not here separating between qualities that are bad and good. No mention is found here of a faithful "few," nor to "some" that had kept their garments unpolluted with the world. No; nothing of the kind; just blame and censure. Had there been anything worth while to commend, the "Faithful and True Witness, the Amen," would certainly have found it and spoken accordingly.

There is no mention of false teaching as either being taught by the pastor or tolerated by the people. Nor is there any reference to "that woman Jezebel," to the false and harmful "teaching of Balaam," or "the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate." They were enduring no great suffering or persecution for Christ's sake, and, certainly none had been called on to suffer to the point of death for His name's sake, as in the church at Smyrna; there were no indications of spiritual warfare or conflict. Everything seemed to be moving along in a perfectly natural, harmless, dignified, decorous way. Things were running smoothly. Nor was there any division among

them. The minister preached his sermons without emotion as the audience listened without feeling. There was a noticeable absence in the church of anything like enthusiasm; the religious thermometer registered "normal." There were no indications of boiling or bubbling over; nor had the zero point been reached. They attended church just as they did the club or the lodge. There was no constraining love of Christ manifested in prayer, praise or preaching. They called upon God as upon any other person, and when they looked into the face of the Saviour it was with no other feeling or expression than that with which they gazed upon the face of a mere human friend. Religious they were—but not overmuch. As one gazed upon the service going on in that church he was not conscious of "the kingdom of God suffering violence," nor was there the slightest indication that "the violent were taking it by force."

Nor was there any struggle between fundamentalism and modernism. You were impressed with the pacifism of religion in the church at Laodicea. They gave you the impression of a perfectly harmless set of good people—they had done no particular harm nor had they done any special good. They worshipped in the ordinary way, and divine services went on as usual. Their motto was "moderation in all things." Of course they had no revivals in that church for they did not believe in emotional religion; they believed in folks becoming Christians in the ordinary, progressive and perfectly normal way. The atmosphere of the church was not too cold, so that you never really shivered or froze with the cold. Nor was it too hot, so that you were in constant need of an electric fan to keep you comfortable and from burning up; you were not in any more danger of being scorched than of being frozen to death. No, you felt when you went to

that church that the atmosphere was neither too cold nor too hot—it was just *comfortable*. What a delightful "atmosphere"! You were assured that if that church had ever been baptized with water, it surely had never been baptized with fire.

And this is just the condition that is nauseating to Christ. Jesus would seem to prefer the extreme to the mediocre. "I would thou wert hot or cold." He would much sooner have attended a meeting at the Rescue Mission or the Salvation Army. He would have gotten much more out of it, and it would have represented Him much better. Jesus is not averse to emotionalism of the right sort. One is led to think that He had some of it Himself at the time His loved ones said "He is beside himself." When the Holy Ghost fell on the little group on the day of Pentecost there was a great deal of unusual emotion, so much so that the people said of the apostles, "these men are drunk." It certainly would have been an insult to the church at Laodicea had any such accusation been made against them. They wanted things done in the ordinary, natural and quiet way; there must be no unusual emotion manifested in the work of that church.

And that is the very reason why the Laodicean church was making absolutely no impression on the world; it was arousing no enmity on the part of the wicked; there was no contending for the faith; the city paid absolutely no attention to the church; it was as though it did not exist. How different with the Church on the day of Pentecost and the days immediately following! What an impression the emotion of Pentecost made upon Jerusalem. We read that the whole city, the elders, officers, chief priests and the people were stirred up and said, "What meaneth this? What is this thing that is happening? Are these men drunk? What makes them carry on so unceremoni-

ously and in so undignified a manner?" To the question of the people, Peter replied: "These men are not drunk" —that is, they are not drunk "as ye suppose." Intoxicated they are—but it is with the Spirit. . . . "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel." It was as though he said: "This is what you should expect when you are filled with the Holy Spirit."

How can the Christian and the Church be lukewarm when we consider the nature of things they profess to believe? To be lukewarm in the face of their reality would be equivalent to the denial of those things. Would it not be better to cast away all profession of belief in these sacred things than to profess to believe them and then not be moved by them? If we really believe that men outside of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus are lost forever, can we be said to really believe that and yet be indifferent to their condition? If you saw a house on fire, and knew that, inside the house, were sleeping parents and little children, would you stand by and give no alarm, show no interest in the saving of those human lives? Of course you would not. Then why not show just as much emotion and earnestness in the case of the saving of a soul? "O," you say, "that's different." No, it is not different; it's worse, that's all; it concerns the death of the soul, and that is of infinitely greater importance than the death of the body. The men who are doing the most damage to the cause of Christ are not necessarily those outside of the Church, but those inside it, those who profess to believe these things and yet are not enthusiastic over them. They are coldly evangelical, but not hotly evangelistic. They are satisfied with singing, "Safe in the arms of Jesus, safe on His gentle breast," but have no place or use for such hymns as, "Rescue the perishing, care for the dying."

This is a nauseating state for any church or Christian to be in, and is distasteful to the Master. He prefers cold or heat to lukewarmness: "*I would thou wert either cold or hot.*" This thing of being "on the dead level" is displeasing to the Master. It is much easier to reach the cold, unconverted sinner, the man who has never felt the warmth of the saving grace of God, than it is to move one who has been fired with that grace and then has grown lukewarm. No human love likes indifference. It were far better than a husband should tell his wife straight out that his love was centred on some other object than her, or even that all the love he had for her has died—far better that, than to profess all the while that he loves her and yet treat her with a lukewarm indifference. It is indifference that kills.

The Laodiceans knew perfectly well what Jesus meant by the expression "lukewarm," for in their neighbourhood were not only hot baths and springs, but also those that were "lukewarm." One could drink of the hot springs and be benefitted by it, but no one could drink of the "lukewarm springs" without vomiting. The "lukewarm" springs were used for bothing, not drinking purposes.

Is it not remarkable that Jesus should say that He preferred freezing to lukewarmness? Why, think you, such a preference? There are a number of reasons. Lukewarmness indicates a spirit of self-satisfaction and self-sufficiency which are always detrimental to the life of the Spirit. It is vital that one should feel his spiritual poverty 'ere he comes to the Saviour. The Pharisees did not feel that; the publicans did, consequently Jesus said to the Pharisees: "The publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you." Then, indifference and lukewarmness are incompatible with real conviction. That is

the trouble with so much pacifism in religious matters today. "Pacifism," like its fellow, "Tolerance," too often indicates a disposition to let things slip, an unwillingness to put oneself out, or inconvenience oneself; it is "the line of least resistance." One who has a real conviction and who sees that conviction assailed is not going to cry "Peace," he is going to declare "war." The world does not expect or look for anything from the man who makes no profession of Christ and religion; but it does, and has a right to expect that the man who makes such a profession shall show evidences of the reality and truth of it in his daily life. When, therefore, a professing Christian does not manifest Christ before the world he is a greater hindrance to the cause of Christ than if he had not made any such profession. The greatest argument for infidelity is an inconsistent professing Christian.

I have read somewhere of a statement made by an infidel, to whom William Booth, who was then a clergyman but who later became the head of the Salvation Army, that is of interest in this connection; indeed, it was this very statement that stirred the heart of Booth and later made him the redhot salvationist he was. The infidel was addressing a crowd on the streets of London. He was haranguing the Church for her inconsistencies. Among other things, he said: "If I believed what you Christians say you believe, I would never rest day nor night telling men about it." Those words stirred the soul of Booth to its depths. He was a Christian, yea, a minister; but he was a lukewarm Christian. The words of that infidel sent the arrow of conviction into his heart. He went to his home, and there told Christ that from that time forth he would be on fire for God and souls. And you know the motto of the Salvation Army is: "Blood and Fire." The general wanted that word "Fire" in the

motto. And was it not the lukewarmness of the Church that led Wesley to form the "Holy Club," and that finally led him to lay the basis of that great soul-winning movement in England? The call of the Church today, more than ever, is for redhot, zealous, boiling, enthusiastic Christians and churches. Will you be a redhot Christian from now on?

"*Thou sayest, I am rich and have gotten riches, and have need of nothing, and knowest not that thou art the wretched one and miserable and blind and naked.*" This was their own estimation of themselves: "Thou sayest." Quite different was Christ's estimation, "Thou art," which we shall look at later. As one reads over this letter carefully he about concludes that their estimation of themselves was about the only Christianity they had, and that was spurious. It is a characteristic of the Christian that he is humble in his opinion of himself; if anything he bemoans his utter unworthiness and sinfulness. Isaiah, Job, David, Peter—indeed, all true saints of God, have made much of their own sin and much of God's holiness. The holy man is the lowly man. The moment a man begins to tell of his goodness you may depend upon it that he is losing his grip on God. It is a mark of growth in grace that there be a continual growth in the *consciousness* of sin. There will be a constant victory over sin, but always a deepening sense of unworthiness.

Paul, the apostle, is a splendid example of this. You may recall that when he first started out in the Christian life he said, "If any other man hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more." When his apostleship was challenged, he said, "I am not a whit behind the very chiefest of the apostles." But Paul came nearer to his Lord and said, "I am one of the apostles;" later, "I am the least of the apostles;" still later, "I am not meet to

be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God." And then, as he became more and more like unto his Master, he said, "I am one of the saints;" and then, later, "I am the least of the saints;" and later still, "I am less than the least of all the saints." And then, when his head was about to fall from the block, and he was to die as a martyr for Christ, he said: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation: that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; *of whom I am chief.*" Yes, the holy man is the lowly man.

The Laodicean church was judging its spiritual state by its temporal advantages. But they were self-deceived, and so were self-complacent and self-satisfied. Had you visited that church you would have been shown the magnificent buildings, splendid equipment, full treasury, highly paid preacher and choir. But you would have been impressed by its silence concerning soul-winning, missions, revivals, Bible conferences for the study of the Word. They would have told you that "they had no need of these things;" they had "need of nothing." It is said of Thomas Aquinas that when he saw a priest counting a large amount of money that had come into the treasury of the church on a certain occasion, he said, "Well, my brother, no longer can the church say, 'Silver and gold have I none!'" "True," replied the monk, "nor can it say, 'In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise and walk.'"

The Church at Smyrna considered itself poor, for it had suffered the confiscation of goods for Christ's sake; yet Jesus said unto it, "Thou art rich." This church at Laodicea considered itself rich and in need of nothing, and yet Jesus said to it, "Thou art poor." He draws attention to the internal need of the church at Laodicea; it occupied itself only with its external condition: it was

unconscious of its weakness: "Thou knowest not." The deepest need of the Laodicean church was a consciousness of its need. While boasting itself among the churches it was all the while unconscious that it, above all others, was in dire need: "*thou* art the poor one, and wretched and blind and naked."

"*Poor*" it was, not in material wealth, but in spiritual service to God. It was as a pauper by the wayside begging. The neglect of Christ was the secret of their forlorn condition, and seeking money the explanation of that condition (Col. 2:1-3; Luke 12:16-21).

"*Blind,*" too, they were. Even though they had one of the finest hospitals known at that time, manned by the finest oculists in the world, and although the finest eye-salve known to man in that day was manufactured there, nevertheless they were "blind." They had become blind to their true condition through their self-deception. They were near-sighted, not being able to see afar off. Their minds were on the temporal only; they had no vision of and for the invisible and eternal. They were devoid of real spiritual sight. Riches are always perilous to vision.

Jesus calls them "*wretched.*" The word means "a burden." The very things they prided themselves in, such as their wealth, were a sore burden. Such were as nether mill-stones that prevent the flight of the soul towards God. They tell us that "riches have wings." They don't. They hold men down as a great millstone. They prevent mounting. We often speak of people as "being heavily burdened with debt." Here are people heavily burdened with unconverted wealth. Riches pierce through the soul as a dart (1 Tim. 6:10); as a canker that eats away the life of a man (Jas. 5:3). Jesus uses the definite article here: "*the* wretched one." These people doubtless had Paul's letter to the Romans and were acquainted with his

" wretched man " (7:24). One wonders if Christ is here referring them to such an one.

" *Naked,*" too, they were, and that in spite of the fact that in their very city, the finest and most expensive raven black woolen garments in the world were made. Yes, in spite of that they have not, as some of the other churches, any " white garments." And the sad thing about it is that they are neither conscious nor ashamed of their nakedness. It is true that it is spiritual nakedness that is referred to, but that is more serious than the nakedness of the body. There is a robe of God's righteousness which must cover the soul ere it can find acceptance with the heavenly Father. How Paul had prayed for these people that they might know the riches of grace in Christ Jesus! (See Col. 1:9-11.)

And so the church in Laodicea becomes an object of pity, " *the miserable one,*" " the pitiable one." A similar expression is used by Paul in First Corinthians, " then we are of all men most pitiable." More pitiable is the " lukewarm " man than the man who is freezing to death. This church was a sorrowful sight because it was self-satisfied, self-complacent and self-congratulatory. It was not that it was hostile; it was just not enthusiastic; it was lukewarm, negative; satisfied with such an experience, and so little.

The Counsel: " I counsel thee to buy of me gold refined by fire, that thou mayest become rich; and white garments, that thou mayest clothe thyself, and that the shame of thy nakedness be not made manifest; and eye-salve to anoint thine eyes, that thou mayest see." One cannot but be impressed with the change from the word " command," as used in the other letters, to that of " counsel " used here by Christ. It is natural, therefore, that we ask why

this change in word of counsel or rebuke? Can it be, think you, that the Master felt that this church had gone so far away from Him that He could no longer command them as His children but felt it incumbent to plead with them as those who had never known His pardoning grace? One is reminded here of a similar plea elsewhere in the word of God: "If thou wilt yet hear me," or "O, that thou wouldst hear me." "O, if thou wilt only listen to me I can give the proper clothing, even 'white raiment' for thy nakedness; I can provide thee with gold that doth not rust nor decay; and I can anoint thine eyes with a heavenly salve that will open them to see great things; yea, I can so anoint your eyes that they can really see the eternal and abiding. The gold that I will give you will stand the test of fire—and that only is worthy of the name of gold that can do that—the fire of the last day. All this I can and will do for you, if you will permit me."

The Rebuke; Censure: "As many as I love, I reprove and chasten: be zealous, therefore, and repent. . . . I am about to spew thee out of my mouth." Are not these most gracious words to be addressed to a church in such an awful, unspiritual condition! One might have expected such words to some one or other of the seven churches, but not to Laodicea. Here again we see how differently Jesus deals with His Church than we do or would if we could. We would have ousted that church without a moment's hesiattion. We would have considered it not worthy of one word of comfort. O, wonderful Saviour! So patient and so kind! "O, Love that will not let me go."

"For the love of God is broader than the measure of man's mind;
And the heart of the eternal is most wonderfully kind."

One cannot but recall the words of Jehovah to backslidden, unbelieving, hard-hearted, sceptical, murmuring Israel as set forth in the book of Malachi: "I have loved you, saith Jehovah." One would not have expected God to say that to a nation that had turned Him down as Israel had done in this connection. But He did. "He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities." O, tender Father, it is such love as this that binds us to Thyself!

"As many as I *love*." And, mark you, the word for "love" is not the formal, official one (agapao); it is one that indicates that He "dearly loves," "affectionately loves" (phileo). "*I rebuke*." These are marvellous words; exceedingly and strikingly significant, for they recall to our minds those words of Jehovah, "Whom the *Lord* loveth he chasteneth." Is this Jesus then "Lord"? Yea, verily; He is "God of God; Light of Light; very God of very God; begotten, not made; being of one substance with the Father."

Here, then, is the loving threat of the loving Lord to come to this church with disciplinary judgments. He had pleaded with them in loving words, but without effect; now He will visit them with loving judgments and disciplinary measures. Yet all, both words and disciplinary judgments, come from His heart of love. Even the call to repentance and the exhortation to look for coming judgment is because He "dearly loves them." He would have them show themselves to be pure gold, tried in the fire, unto the praise and glory of God. Yet His love cannot cover up sin; it must be faced, repented of and put away, and there must be a renewal of consecration to God.

"*I am about to spew thee out of my mouth.*" He has not done it yet; He does not want to do it, nor will He

until there is absolutely nothing else to do. He tells them that He "is about to do it," that He "has it in mind to," and that He "is thinking of rejecting them with abhorrence." No, He hasn't done it yet, but He is intent on it unless they repent. There is still room for change on their part, and that will of course determine what He will do. Here is a most pathetic appeal. It reminds us of His weeping over Jerusalem. Did Laodicea repent? We think so. Was the Laodicean church spewed out of His mouth? We think not; for history points to a church flourishing there in later times; indeed, it was the council of Laodicea, in A. D. 361, that determined the canon of the Scriptures.

How shall they repent? First, by getting hot: "*Be zealous.*" If you are cold and freezing the way to get warm is to get close to the fire and stay there. So this church is exhorted to get close to Christ and stay close. Then, *Let Him in the heart: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him and sup with him, and he with me.*"

What a picture! Chastening, He knocks; standing, He speaks! "*Behold.*" Wake up and look! It is as though the Saviour says, "I am not in your lukewarmness nor in your lukewarm church, for its condition is intolerable to me. But I stand here on the outside, at the very door, ready to enter if you will invite me." What wonderful words when you remember that He could have smashed His way in. Then, too, He has the keys. Yet He will not force His way into any heart or church. "He made as though he would have gone further, but they constrained him, saying, Abide with us, Lord, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. And he went in with them." He will always enter if He is invited; not otherwise.

You have doubtless heard the story connected with the famous painting of "Christ knocking at the Door." The Master is portrayed as standing, lantern in hand, His hair apparently wet with the dews of the night, knocking at a door which is supposed to represent the human heart. When the artist had painted the picture he called some of his friends to come and see it. One of them ventured to call his attention to what he considered a grievous omission. The artist, startled, asked his friend to point it out. "Can't you see it yourself?" the friend asked, "why it seems perfectly plain to me, and surely should be to you." "Well, I must confess," replied the artist, "I do not see it, and I will be obliged to you if you will point it out to me." "Certainly," said the friend, and suiting the action to the word he pointed to the door and said, "See, it has no latch on it; who ever saw a door without a latch or knob on it?" "That is true," the artist made answer, "of an ordinary door; but this is not an ordinary door; it is a picture of the sinner's heart and Christ knocking, seeking admission. The latch is *on the inside.* That is what I intended, for Christ cannot enter the human heart unless it is opened from the inside."

"Behold, I have been standing at the door and knocking"—that is the way the text reads. "I have been a long time waiting and now I am drawing nearer—I am at the door." We have noted the progress of His coming in these letters: "I come." . . . "I am coming quickly." . . . "I come as a thief." . . . "I am standing at the door." He will stand at the door as Saviour or Judge. How shall we meet Him? Here again we see the patience and longsuffering of Christ.

We ought to be standing before *Him,* and beseeching admission, for He is "the Door," but Jesus in His wonderful condescension reverses that here. But some day—

and what a sad day it will be—the sinner will surely stand before Christ and heaven's gate knocking, begging admission. "Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are. Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Luke 13:24-28).

"Some one will knock and will not be heard,
By and by; by and by.
Hear a voice saying, 'I know you not,'
Shall you; shall I?"

Let us not forget that it is not outside the sinner's heart, but outside the door of one of His churches that Jesus is here standing and knocking. He had found it impossible to abide in their midst, and perhaps they would not have been comfortable in their lukewarm condition to have had Him do so. This church seemed to have had everything else except Christ: it had wealth, culture, organization, prestige, dignity, decorum—everything but Christ, and He stood on the outside knocking, trying to get in. He had been put out of that church, not intentionally, of course; certainly He had not been thrust out unceremoniously, for they never did anything in an undignified way in that church. But gradually they pushed Him out. He cannot live in an atmosphere that is lukewarm, insipid, torpid, indifferent, passionless, heartless, spiritless, soul-

less, unimpressed, unexcited, unmoved, unstirred, untouched, unshocked, unblushing, apathetic.

Jesus "knocks" as well as "stands." Do you notice that? He stands on the outside of the church pleading with the obdurate within. In trials, adversities, sorrows—He "knocks." He "speaks" in and through the voice in the heart, the spirit, the conscience, so that through these disciplinary experiences we come to understand the meaning of the *voice* and the *knock.*

The glad thing about all this is that the soul may hear that voice and let Him in and have a continual feast: "*I will sup with him, and he with me.*" The sad thing about it is that no one is compelled to open the door. He can keep Christ standing outside. The fathers used to talk about "irresistible grace." Well, it is difficult to see it; it simply is not in this text. No man is forced to open the door.

"*If any man.*" Here we find Jesus appealing to the single individual. We have heard Him appealing to "the few," "to those who hold not this doctrine," "to those," etc. Now it is "if any man." Has it come to this that in the church at Laodicea it was a question if there was an individual that was not lukewarm, self-righteous, self-satisfied and self-complacent? It would appear so, would it not?

But perhaps there is another lesson in the emphasis here on the individual. Would Christ indicate, think you, that the way for the whole church to get back to fellowship is for each individual to get back; that, as in the matter of salvation, God deals with the individual soul, so in the matter of a church getting back to its place of communion and power, it must come back individually? It is true, as we have seen, that there are times when the whole church is called upon, as a corporate body, to re-

pent, return and get back to prayer, consecration and fellowship. Nevertheless, there is an *individual* aspect to all this, and perhaps that is why the individual emphasis is mentioned here. Perhaps the needed lesson here is that as there is no *social salvation,* so there is no *churchly consecration* that does not deal first with the individual.

It has happened that one man getting right with Christ has brought a whole church back to its place with Christ. And it would be a wonderful thing indeed if even one man in a church would yield himself up unreservedly to Christ. Who could measure that one man's influence? It is related of Mr. Moody that one night he went to hear Mr. Henry Varley, of London, England, preach. Among the many good things Mr. Varley said, one striking sentence stood out clearly before Mr. Moody, who was then but a youth. This was the sentence: "It remains yet to be seen what God will do with any man who will absolutely consecrate his life to Jesus Christ." On his way home, or rather to the Y. M. C. A., where he had a room, that sentence was ringing in his ears. He knelt down by his bed and said to God: "O, God; I heard what that man said tonight: 'That it remained yet to be seen what God will do with any man who will absolutely consecrate his life to Jesus Christ.' O God, I will be that man. Take me now, body, soul and spirit, and consecrate me to thy service. I am wholly thine from this time forth." The world well knows what was the result of the dedication of Mr. Moody to this world and the salvation of men. Perhaps no man since the days of the apostles has done more to bring sinners to Christ than Dwight L. Moody.

"*I will sup with him and he with me.*" This is quite in contrast with the words to the church: "I will spew

thee out of my mouth." "I will hold supper with him and he with me." How? Well, we can feed on Him in and through His Word. We can hold fellowship with Him as we break the bread and drink the wine at the communion table. And then, shall we not sit down with Him at the marriage supper of the Lamb? And will not the believer there be the *host,* and Jesus the One who girds and serves. "I am among you as one that serveth."

The Promised Reward: "He that overcometh I will give to sit down with me in my throne, as I also overcame, and sat down with my Father in his throne." This is perhaps the greatest reward of all the seven, and possibly because the conflict waged is the most difficult. Indifference is always harder to overcome than even violent and virulent opposition and persecution. The "overcomer" is to "sit with Christ in his throne." Can there be any greater honour than this? John and James considered it the highest honour to sit one at the right and the other at the left hand of Jesus. Jesus speaks of His having sat down with the Father in His throne after He had "overcome." Yes, He knows well what it is to be tempted along the lines of the church at Laodicea. Was not the temptation in the wilderness a suggestion of the devil that Jesus follow the lines of least resistance in the establishment of the kingdom? Did not Satan urge a little more caution and a little less zeal in the carrying out of the divine purpose? Did he not suggest to Christ again and again that He "spare himself." There was always the temptation to save Himself rather than practice self-denial. O yes; Jesus knew all about that, but He "overcame," and is now "sitting with the Father in his throne."

"'Callest Thou thus, O Master? Callest Thou thus to me?
I am weary and heavy-laden, and longing to come to Thee;
And out in the distant darkness Thy dear voice sounds so sweet;
But I am not worth, not worthy, O Master, to kiss Thy feet.'

"'Child,' said the loving Master, 'why turnest thou thus away,
When I came through the darkness seeking my sheep that have gone astray?
I know thou art heavy laden; I know thou hast need of Me;
And the feet of thy loving Master are weary with seeking thee.'

"'Callest Thou thus, O Master? Callest Thou thus to me?
When my untrimmed lamp is dying, and my heart is not fit for Thee?
For Thou art so great and holy; and mine is so poor a home,
And I am not worthy, O Master; not worthy that Thou shouldst come.'

"'Child,' said the tender Master—and His voice was very sweet;
'I only ask for a welcome, and rest for My weary feet.'
'Then over my lonely threshold, though weak and defiled by sin,
Though I am not worthy, O Master, I pray thee enter in.'"

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